

ADVENTURES OF KA-ZAR THE GREAT

KA-ZAR

A Thrilling
KA-ZAR
Novel

KING
OF
FANG AND CLAW
by Bob Byrd

ALSO
SHORT
STORIES



KA-ZAR

KA-ZAR appeared in three issues of his own PULP magazine, published by Manvis Publishing Co. in 1936. This ODYSSEY PUBLICATIONS 'full count' reprint is a redoing of the first issue, originally dated Oct./1936. (ODYSSEY has sheduled the remaining two issues for reprinting later in this series). A slightly rewritten version of this first issue was published in book form by a British publisher.

KA-ZAR reappeared in 1939 as "Adventures of Ka-zar from the Famous Character Created by Bob Byrd", a serial feature in Timely Publications' "Marvel Mystery Magazine". Timely was started by publisher Martin Goodman (the Man of Manvis Publishing Co.). The 'Timely' company was, of course, the ancestor of today's Marvel Comics Group. It was the redoubtable Stan Lee of this group who re-incarnated KA-ZAR in a whole new series of illustrated adventures in 1965.

In the original, KA-ZAR is a wonderfully written PULP exploring the realms of a theme (the human child raised by wild beasts of nature) that extends itself back in time to the earliest of recorded myth. (Consider the traditional tale of the mythic founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, as an example). This theme, as refined by Rudyard Kipling in his 'Jungle Books', was crystalized to its PULP fiction purity by Edgar Rice Burroughs. A brief appreciation of the extent of ERB's influential contribution to PULP is detailed in the article "Noble, Yet Savage, Yet Pure". This article new to this edition, replaces the otherwise superfluous original advertisments.

THIS IS ODYSSEY PUBLICATION, #5
'A full count reprint.'

KA-ZAR



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Vol. 1, No. 1

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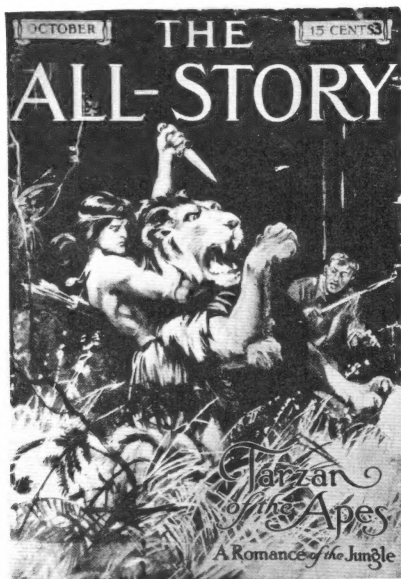
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Cover painting by J. W. Scott
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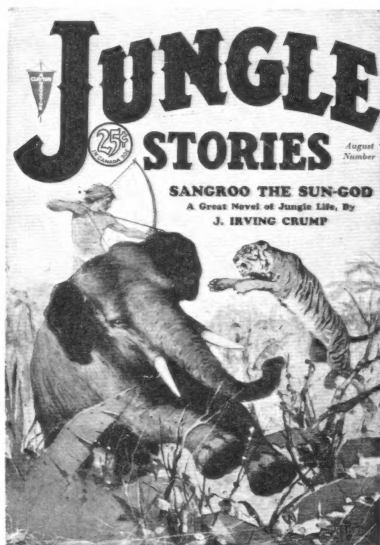


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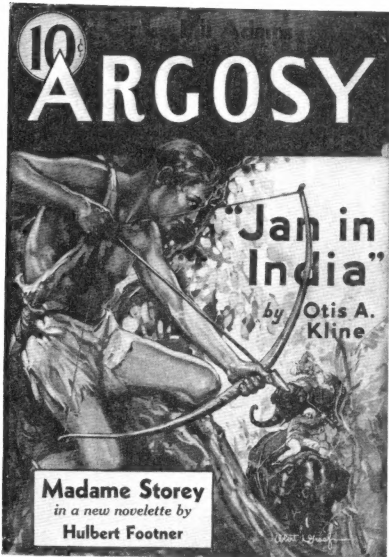
Myths throughout time relate many adventures of the Children of Man being returned, by the quirks of Fate, to the Wild State, there to be nurtured and fostered by the beasts of nature. As many, too, are the parallel stories of the half human half beast beings (e.g. were-devils, lycanthropes, etc.).

These myths have been filtered into our Literature, where they have been told and retold many a time and again. These tales run a gamut from grand adventurings to supernatural horror. Just how effectively they are written determines their lasting influence on writings yet to be.

The first links in a fine chain spanning the time between the myth of the founder of Ancient Rome and the literary rewavings of this story, by Rudyard Kipling, can be forged easily enough. Romulus, founder and first King of Rome, had (as Myth relates) been raised (along with his twin brother Remus) by a great she-wolf, after misfortune had abandoned him to the wilds of nature. In "The Jungle Book", Kipling tells the story of a tyke who wanders into the wild Indian Jungle where he is adopted and raised by the wolves --who call him Mowgli. Kipling was reshaping the Myth into



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Literature by incorporating the elements of an anthropological theory that was current at the time, That of the "Noble Savage". (This theory was a 'backlash' formulation rendered by people who were ((even then)) appalled by the debasing hassles they perceived in city living, as opposed to the 'noble purity' they saw in the peoples who lived in harmony with nature).

Kipling orchestrated a marvelous fantasy in tune with this theory. It remained to Edgar Rice Burroughs to add the strongest link to our literary chain. Within the realm of great PULP fictions, "Tarzan of the Apes" was THE most influential of all creations for the number and quality of imitations it was to inspire. Where Kipling dis-

tilled the essence of classic Myth, Burroughs refined it to its crystalline purity. (Kipling, in fact, cited Tarzan as the most effective continuation of his inspiration. ERB for his part, discounted any conscious connection with Kipling. Nonetheless...)

If Burroughs had written but the one novel "Tarzan of the Apes", its impact might have been even greater still! Whereas, Kipling's similar story (ending with Mowgli electing to remain with the children of nature) ERB's Tarzan's repudiation of his rightful claim to his material legacy and the woman he really loves with a 'beau geste' is at once tragic, ironic and so heart renderingly touching as to be the quintessence of Romanticism. At once; Noble, yet Savage, yet Pure.



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Regardless the speculations though, Burroughs (due to his real life needs, along with a clamoring public, urging) became his own best imitator. ERB wrote 23 more novels about Tarzan as well as the adventures of other characters on Mars, the Inner World Pellucidar and Venus. From ERB onward our literary chain gets lengthier still, in numerous well wrought workings of the Mowgli/Tarzan theme. The real wealth of such wonder is in evidence throughout this short article. Unfortunately, space precludes the illustration of but a few examples of original PULP appearances.

"Sangroo the Sun God" by J. Irving Crump (illus. page 2) appeared in the first issue of Clayton's JUNGLE

STORIES for Aug./1931. Sangroo (survivor of an airplane crash) is adopted by nature and grows to an adventurous maturity in the jungles of the Malay Peninsula.

Otis Adelbert Kline, a facile PULP writer, locked so tightly onto the 'Burroughs style' that he really rattled the Master. It began with his 'Prince of Peril' series, that took place on Venus. It all hammered home with the ARGOSY serial titled "Jan of the Jungle" which started in the 18/June/1931 issue. ERB Retaliated by invading Venus with his 'Carson of Venus' series. Kline then countered by invading the planet Mars for yet another series. "Jan Goes To India", for further enchantments (see illus. on page 3). This was an ARGOSY serial begun 12/Jan/35.



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Ka-zar by Bob Byrd is at hand, thanks to this special reprinting, for the re-reading.

William Chester created a series for BLUE BOOK (although not strictly within the Tarzan theme, close enough to leave little doubt as to source of inspiration). His character was Kioga, (see illus., page 3, of the May/1936 cover on "Kioga of the Wilderness").

Fiction House reintroduced JUNGLE STORIES in 1938 featuring a new 'Lord of the Jungle' --Ki-gor. This title was very popular. It ran for 16 years.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for Oct/1940 featured "Jongor of Lost Land". Lost Land was a Saurian infested pocket of Australia. (See page no. 4 for both Ki-gor and Jongor).



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The British Curtis group got the home vines swinging in 1948 with "Azan the Ape Man", (a more 'Tintype Tarzan' could not exist). But Fiction House finally broke the mold with STORIES OF SHEENA QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE in 1951. Just a bit too much, even now!!!





BOOK ONE OF
KA-ZAR OF THE BEASTS

*K*ING OF *C*LAW AND *F*ANG
by Bob Byrd

CHAPTER I
HEART OF DARKNESS

THE Congo—heart of darkest Africa—two degrees south of the Equator.

Abruptly the sun was blotted out and a sudden deluge descended from the heavens. It fell steadily in a silver sheet

for five minutes, then as abruptly stopped. It was the first rain, marking the beginning of the rainy season.

The brassy sun showed its molten face again, hotter than before. From the floor of the primeval jungle a miasmic mist steamed slowly upward. The air was sullen, brooding, oppressive.

From a thousand giant trees, matted and festooned with an impenetrable

tangle of vines, the lemurs scolded querulously at one another. Vividly plumed birds screamed hoarsely as they flitted from tree to tree. And the beasts of the earth snarled and spat at each other as they wrangled over their kill.

Through the menacing brooding jungle stalked the mighty white youth Ka-Zar discovering, fighting, conquering beasts, savages and white men who came to kill, and steal the golden treasures from this primeval heart of the Congo.

Darkest Africa, where Nature had been prodigal and profligate. She had peopled this, her richest land, with a myriad of living things—plant, beast, bird and fish. And then, as if regretting her generosity, she had pitted the one against the other. Let the Law be that of Claw and Fang; let the strong survive.

Suddenly, above the teeming noises of earth and air, a mighty roar rever-

berated between the trees. As if blasted by an evil curse the jungle was hushed.

Then, a moment later, with a majestic stride a mighty lion pushed through the brush and stepped into a small, open clearing that bordered a lake of cerulean blue.

Zar the Mighty paused a moment on the edge of the clearing. Slowly, disdainfully he swung his massive head from side to side as he surveyed his domain. His tawny mane

was ruffed; his tufted tail switched nervously from side to side.

Again he tilted back his head. Again the rumbling bass note of his defiance filled the clearing. But there was no one who dared answer his challenge.



Zar snorted contemptuously, lashed his tail once more and proceeded slowly down to the water's edge. This respectful silence that greeted his coming was fitting to his might and dignity. For wasn't he Zar the Mighty—Lord of the Jungle?

He drank, long and deeply. But minutes before he had his fill his head snapped up. A snarl rumbled in his throat; his leather lungs expanded and the talons of his fore-paws arched.

From high over head came an angry, droning buzz that grew louder, more insistent with every moment's passing. Zar threw back his head and looked up between the trees. What fool of a bird was this who dared challenge the might of his claw and fang?

And then he saw it, first as a speck looming out of the south. It advanced rapidly, with incredible speed, flying low; and the roar of its coming put even Zar's stentorian bellow to shame.

THIS was not Pindar the Eagle or Kru come to the vulture's feast. Zar had never seen such a bird before—one with such an incredible spread of wing—one that screamed its defiance as it flew like an arrow.

However, he felt no fear in its presence. His muscles simply bulged in anger.

From slitted, amber eyes he watched the strange bird as it soared above the clearing. It cleared the far side, then suddenly, without warning, a jet of black smoke belched forth from its side.

Zar's snarl rose on a higher note. He held his ground but crouched low. What trick was this? What strange method of attack from this strange bird?

Then, still watching, he saw the winged thing stagger in mid-air, pivot around on its mighty spread of shining wings and glide down for the clearing where he stood.

Zar ruled the jungle because of his

cunning as well as his strength. Confronted by the unknown for the first time in his life, he decided to stalk this new enemy. With one bound he cleared the shore of the lake; with another he was crouched low in the tangle of brush that bordered the clearing.

Above him he heard a rushing roar of air that made him think of the times when the jungle trees bent to the storm's fury. And high above this sound came an eerie wail that grated down the long length of his supple spine.

Crouching low he looked up. The bird was swooping down headed straight for him. Smoke still jetted from its belly. It was clearing the trees now at the far side. He watched with a fascination tempered by awe. Then abruptly he tensed. One wing of this new, fantastic creature had carelessly brushed the outflung arm of a tree. There was a tearing, rending noise; the wing sheered off and the bird reeled.

Zar knew then that it was wounded and his lips bared back from his fangs. With a quiet, implacable intentness he watched the stricken thing spin to earth, crash on its one good wing and beak, bounce high into the air again, then settle down to earth with a dull thud.

Caution still ruled Zar the Mighty. This might be some ruse or trick with which he was unfamiliar. He decided to wait a moment before making his charge.

His amber eyes glinting warily, he watched. There was a stir of hurried activity about the stricken bird. Then some strange beast, the like of which Zar had never seen before, jumped from the belly of the mammoth of the skies. It walked erect on two feet like N'Guru, the gorilla.

But some instinct told Zar that this was not N'Guru, the only living thing in the jungle that dared challenge his reign. This strange beast was smaller than N'Guru, puny in comparison. Its

face was white and hairless and its body was covered with something that was neither skin, fur nor feather.

The short hair stirred at the base of Zar's skull. His lips pulled back from his long, yellow teeth. A growl started deep in his throat but died still-born.

For, for the first time in his life, Zar was moved by an alien emotion—an emotion he found hard to understand. With a rising anger he realized that it was fear—fear of that ridiculous, puny, two-legged creature with the sickly-white skin.

His tail beat a savage tattoo on the earth. In his cunning, animal brain he tried to reason himself free from the shameful thing that clutched his heart. Wasn't he Zar the Mighty? One blow from his saber-tipped claws would rip the strange beast from throat to belly.

But the nameless fear held him still. It was beyond his simple, elemental reasoning. It was instinctive, deep-rooted, instilled in all animal kind since the first man climbed down from the trees and walked erect on two feet.

And with the coming of fear to Zar's heart, came hate—hate for this two-legged creature who stilled the battle-cry in his throat. He snarled in frustrated fury, turned from the clearing and plunged deep into the jungle growth.

CHAPTER II

THE JUNGLE TALKS

JOHN RAND was not aware of the long, bleeding gash in his forearm as he staggered from the wreckage of his plane. His only thought was for the other two who had crashed with him. With a desperate energy he tore at the shattered rear cockpit.

"Constance!" he called hoarsely. "David!"

A thin wail answered him, spurred him frantically on. A moment later he grasped a curly-headed, three-year-old boy and pulled him from the tangle of wood and metal. The child whimpered, more from fright than from pain. There was a swelling lump on his forehead, a long scratch down one cheek.

"Don't cry, son," begged Rand. "We're safely on land, now."

Swiftly he ran his hands over the sturdy little body and was relieved to find that the youngster had received no more than a bad shaking up. Then he jumped back to the plane in search of his wife.

He found her lying with her soft blonde hair pillowed against the crash pad, the heart-shaped oval of her face pallid and her eyes closed. With an ache in his heart he lifted her tenderly from the wreckage and lowered her to the ground beside the plane.

"Constance!" he called huskily. "You're not hurt?"

He raised her head. Her eyelids fluttered, opened. He repeated his anxious question.

Constance Rand's eyes were clouded with pain but she smiled nevertheless when she saw her son staring at her from round, surprised eyes. She reached out, ran tender fingers through his tousled hair in a swift caress. Then she looked up at her husband, still smiling.

"You know, John," she said coolly. "I thought it was the end. I prayed."

John Rand grinned down at her. "And lo! Your prayer was answered. Here we are, all safe and . . ." A twinge of pain crossed the girl's face. "Hello! You're hurt," continued Rand, suddenly sober.

"Terribly careless of me," said Constance. "But I'm afraid I am. My leg."

"Here—let's have a look," said Rand. Drawing his pocket-knife he hastily

slit the left leg of her khaki breeches. Just below the knee the flesh was bruised and swollen. As gently as possible his fingers probed the injured area. And a moment later his face grew grave.

Watching him with anxious eyes, the girl saw. "Is it . . ." she began tentatively.

Rand nodded his head. "Yes—it's broken," he admitted reluctantly.

With a little sigh Constance sank back. "I was afraid of that," she said.

"Mummy hurt?" asked young David brightly.

Constance nodded and Rand managed a wry grin.

"Cheer up, darling. It's a simple break. We'll have you all mended and about in a short time."

Snatching his helmet from his head, he despatched the youngster to fill it with water from the lake. Then picking up his wife he settled her comfortably in the shadow of the plane's fuselage and began a crude but efficient job of resetting the broken bone.

A small medical kit had been part of the ship's equipment when it had taken off from Johannesburg that morning. But it was a painful ordeal at best. It was sheer nerve alone that kept Constance from crying out. Once—and only once—twin tears squeezed from the corners of her eyelids and coursed in the crystalline drops down her pale cheeks. She concentrated on her set teeth and clenched her tiny fists so tightly that her nails cut into her palms.

IT was not until the last splint and bandage was set firmly in place that her mind once more was free to consider their surroundings. Then her heart-felt relief that David had been unhurt in the crash and that her husband had escaped with a minor cut or two, gave way to new fears and doubts. She bathed the swollen lump on her son's forehead as Rand stayed the

bleeding of his own arm. It was a curious monkey, who peering down at them and scolding them for their unwarranted intrusion, made her realize the wildness of their landing place.

"John," she asked evenly, "just what part of Africa did you choose to crack up in? Where are we?"

Rand tried to make his voice as casual as hers. "Oh, somewhere in the Belgian Congo," he replied with a shrug.

Constance's arms crept about the youngster in a protecting gesture, drew him close to her. "The Congo," she breathed. "The heart of the jungle." Then: "How long will it take us—how far is it—to—to civilization?"

John Rand could not find it in his heart to answer her question, to tell her how many hundred miles of almost impassable wilderness lay between them and the nearest outpost of the white man. Instead, without looking up, he replied easily: "We don't have to worry about that, darling. When we don't show up in Cairo they'll send a flock of planes out to search for us. One will be along any day now."

And then, as if to mock this calm assurance, somewhere deep in the jungle the mighty Zar vented his rage in a thunderous roar. Young David cocked his head and listened in wide-eyed curiosity. But a low cry broke from his mother's lips. She tightened her grip about the boy.

"John," she said, trying hard to hide the catch in her voice, "if it wasn't for you—I'd be afraid."

Rand leaned over and kissed her swiftly. "You're a brick, Connie. I've gotten you into this mess and I'll get you out." Then he straightened up to his full height. He was a young man, bronzed by the African sun, with wide shoulders and lean hips and muscles of whipcord and steel. The roar of the jungle lord was a challenge and he accepted it.

"Keep your nerve up, Connie," he said easily. "We'll be out of this in a few days. Till then, I have a rifle, two automatics and plenty of cartridges in the plane. We won't go hungry and nothing shall harm you. In a few days you'll be sitting on the verandah of Sheppard's Hotel in Cairo, telling all your friends about your thrilling sojourn in the Congo."

She touched his hand in a fleeting caress. "All right, John," she smiled up at him. "I'll be good. If only I hadn't hurt my leg, I could help you. Now, David and I will simply have to watch you labor."

"That'll be help enough," he answered.

Had he been alone in this predicament, with its promise of danger and excitement, John Rand might have actually enjoyed the experience. It was not the first time in his adventurous career that he had had to call upon his ingenuity and resourcefulness to survive. He had earned the self-confidence which now possessed him.

Hunting through the tangled debris that had been the plane he salvaged their luggage. He regretted that he had taken no such item as an axe with him but he had a stout knife and it would have to serve his purpose. Armed with it, he slashed boughs from the trees that fringed the clearing, tore great lengths from the tough lianas that hung in loops from the branches down to the jungle floor. The plane would never leave the earth again; it was wrecked beyond all repair. So he put the shattered parts to better use.

By the time the sweltering day had drawn to a close he had erected a makeshift but comfortable lean-to under the protecting wing of the plane.

THE setting sun lingered a moment atop a distant mountain peak that thrust a jagged cone, sheer and forbid-

ding in the western sky. Its last slanting rays bathed the clearing and the lake beyond in molten gold. Mauve shadows crept out from under the dense trees of the surrounding forest. Then the sun dropped down behind the peak and the deepening shadows encroached upon the makeshift camp.

In front of the shelter, Rand built a roaring fire. From the cot of leafy branches that he had prepared for her, Constance watched him from soft eyes. Like all emotions of childhood, David's first fear had been short-lived. Now he was enchanted with this strange, new environment. With fascinated eyes he watched the birds make their last brilliant flights across the clearing and come to roost in the tops of the giant trees. A scampering monkey made him clap his hands in delight.

Whistling cheerfully, Rand prepared a meal from the scant provisions that they had carried in the plane. A tin of biscuit, bars of chocolate and powdered milk. The latter he mixed with water from the lake and heated in battered tin cups over the fire.

Night comes suddenly in the jungle. The magnificent sunset was followed by a brief twilight while they ate. When Rand went to rinse out the cups at the shore of the lake, a chill wind blew in across the waters. It rustled the leaves of the trees and awakened other noises and murmurs in the forest depths. An incessant chattering rose above the low hum of myriad insects. Some creature—bird or animal, he did not know—occasionally emitted a plaintive wail.

He came back to find David curled up in his mother's arms, peacefully asleep. Getting coats and a tarpaulin from the wreckage of the plane, he covered them both. Then with his rifle across his knees, he sat down with his back against the open end of the shelter, prepared for an all-night vigil.

For a while husband and wife con-

versed in low tones, careful lest they wake the sleeping youngster. Beyond the circle of light cast by the fire, the jungle was a wall of impenetrable blackness. Once greenish eyes winked back at them. Rand threw another handful of brush on the blaze and the eyes vanished. With soothing words he reassured his helpless wife.

Whether her confidence in him banished her nameless fears, or whether the terrific strain of the day's events had taken its toll at last, he did not know. But the blessed sleep that claimed David stole over Constance at last. And John Rand remained alone at his post on vigilant guard.

At first the myriad noises of the night held his entire attention. Unseen life stirred in the tree-tops. Strange rustlings sounded around the wreckage of the plane. Once, far out on the lake, there was a mighty splash. Twice during the night, deep in the jungle a panther screamed. Both times David cried out and both times Constance awoke to quiet him with a tender hand and murmured words of comfort.

The stars, though of dazzling brilliance, seemed very far away and cold. Gradually the various sounds of the jungle grew more familiar in Rand's ears and his mind strayed back to the events leading up to their disastrous crash.

CHAPTER III

MAROONED

A HIGH-SPIRITED young Yank, John Rand had roamed the world in search of adventure and fortune. He had found them both. The Gods had indeed been kind to him.

In a romantic two-weeks' interlude between his fortune seeking expeditions,

he had wooed and won the gentle Constance and had spirited her away from under the very nose of the stern headmistress of a fashionable French finishing school. Neither of them had ever regretted the elopement.

Constance had brought her share of luck with her, for shortly after their marriage, Rand had stumbled on a rich diamond field in the Transvaal and wealth had become theirs. And with the birth of their son a year later, their home on the outskirts of Johannesburg had become a paradise indeed.

Now looking into the glowing heart of the fire in the depths of the jungle, Rand wondered at the strange trick Fate had played on him. In his adventuresome youth he had learned many things and the art of flying an airplane had been not the least of them. For his own pleasure, when the income from the diamond field permitted him to satisfy all his desires, he had purchased and maintained the plane that now lay in ruins behind him.

And when Constance had received the telegram two days before, that her father was seriously ill in Cairo, he had immediately suggested that they make the trip to his bedside in the plane. That their course would lay over thousands of miles of wild and dangerous territory, they had never considered for a moment.

Rand sighed. If it had been himself alone who had crashed, he would not have minded. But Constance and his son complicated the situation.

He shrugged philosophically. They would be there a couple of days at the most. A rescue ship would surely come in search of them—probably it was on its way already. He would be ready for it. In the morning he would prepare a great signal fire in the center of the clearing, ready to be lit at the first sound of an approaching plane. It was fortunate indeed that they had crashed in the clearing instead of in the heart of

the thick jungle. A rescue ship could make a safe landing and easily take off.

The fire died down to glowing embers. He caught himself nodding, prodded the blaze to life again and added more brush. Slowly the stars wheeled their majestic course across the heavens and the hours passed. Then at long last the impenetrable blackness slowly lightened to a murky gray, the first herald of the coming day. Rand stirred, rose and stretched and greeted the booming sunrise with a smile.

Young David pushed back the tarpaulin with chubby hands, sat up and looked about him with wondering eyes. Rand placed a finger to his lips, lifted the youngster across the still form of his mother and led him down to the lake.

To a three-year-old, to whom the common-place features of every-day life are still a mystery and a delight, the heart of the African jungle is hardly more startling. David was enchanted. To him, the Dark Continent was a place of dazzling sunshine and brilliant color; of pleasing smells and intriguing noises.

The night life of the jungle had died with the dawn to yield place to the equally noisy life of day. A flight of long-tailed, scarlet birds wafted across the lake and came to rest in a squawking group in the tree-tops. Slender, spidery monkeys trooped through the branches and peered curiously down at the strange invaders of their domain. One, bolder than the rest, cautiously approached the tail of the plane. With a gleeful whoop, David ran to catch it.

Rand smiled at the comical mixture of surprise and disappointment on his face when the monkey scurried agilely off, mocking the youngster over his shoulder as he went.

WHEN they came back to the lean-to to prepare breakfast they found Constance awake. Her leg was setting nicely and bothered her little. Rand

adjusted the splints, served breakfast and then set to work to prepare the signal fire. He warned his wife that yet another day might pass before rescue came, but the sight of the towering brushpile and the wet tarpaulin lying beside it, ready to blanket the smoke and send it up in signal puffs, cheered her greatly.

She made no complaint, though Rand knew that her broken leg gave her constant pain. The loaded rifle was set against the lean-to and young David warned of dire results if he should touch it. An automatic was strapped to Rand's belt and thus prepared for whatever the day might bring, he set to work to make their shelter yet more comfortable and safe.

To the youngster, this task was delightful play. Despite his happy conviction that he was being of great assistance, he was constantly underfoot. He picked up his father's knife, dropped it and the sharp blade missed his foot by inches. He stumbled over a gnarled root and the rush of his fall blew a shower of sparks from the fire a scant foot away. Ten minutes later, while making faces at himself in the mirror of the lake he fell into the water and was thoroughly drenched. After that episode he was seated beside his mother and requested to remain there.

The day wore on, hot and sultry, with a sudden deluge in mid-afternoon. A few minutes later the torrid sun turned the damp floor of the jungle to a steaming mist. Always Rand and his wife listened, ears strained, for the sound of an approaching motor.



The sun wheeled its long arc across the heavens and headed down towards the distant mountain peak that rose up, to meet it. At last they touched, quivering in a shimmer of heat and a riotous sunset flared its vivid colors over the land. And then, in the brief hush of silence with which the jungle paid tribute to the sun's glory, they heard the sound for which they had been waiting.

The jungle had humming noises of its own. But the distant drone of a powerful motor floated unmistakably across the still air. Rand leaped at once to his waiting pile of brush. With hands that trembled slightly in their eagerness he scratched a match and set it ablaze. Then, after a moment, he seized the damp tarpaulin and blanketed the flames.

The drone of the approaching plane grew steadily louder. Whipping back the tarpaulin, Rand set a great puff of black smoke skyward. Then hastily he blanketed the fire again, to repeat the operation.

The last slanting rays of the sun picked out a glinting speck in the sky and turned it to shining gold. It grew slowly larger until it resembled a giant, iridescent dragon fly soaring far above the earth.

"John!" called Constance anxiously. "He's going to miss us. He's bearing north instead of west!"

Rand flung a hasty glance upward. He whipped up a last cloud of smoke from his fire, then clutching the tarpaulin, he raced down to the shore of the lake.

The plane loomed larger now but its nose was not pointed directly for the clearing. And it was riding high—much higher than Rand would have wished. With a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach, he realized that from where the unknown pilot rode in his cockpit, the wreckage of Rand's ship was hidden

by the towering trees and the clearing itself was scarcely visible.

Swiftly he splashed out into the lake until the water rose above his waist and waved the tarpaulin over his head. But the plane held to its steady course and did not falter.

THOUGH he knew the pilot could not hear him, he cried out hoarsely. He flapped the heavy tarpaulin until his arms ached. But neither the rising column of smoke from the clearing nor his wildly gesticulating figure were seen. The motor of the ship in the air rose to a high crescendo, then diminished again as it continued on.

Not until it had become a vanishing dot in the blue did John Rand's arms drop. Wearily he plodded back to his wife and child. Constance made a manful effort to conceal her bitter disappointment. She smiled, a little tremulously.

"Well, it looks as though we've failed to thumb a ride."

Rand dropped the tarpaulin and sank down beside her. "Pooh! This is a main highway. Busy traffic. There'll be another along in a moment." Then, more soberly, he went on. "He'll be back—probably tomorrow. It was the sunset. If he had come an hour earlier, he'd have spotted me at the edge of the lake. Or if he'd come an hour later, he'd have seen the light of the fire. Better luck next time."

But in the most important aspect of this optimistic prediction, Rand was wrong. True, the plane came again on the next day—and one the day after that. But each time it was farther from their lonely camp. The last time it appeared, it was but a dim speck far towards the horizon.

Helplessly they watched it vanish from their sight and no amount of forced good humor could hide the ache in their hearts.

Then three days passed and though they strained eyes and ears, the ship did not come again. Reluctantly they had to voice the dismal conclusion that their would-be rescuers had given them up to the jungle.

Constance consoled herself with the thought that as soon as her leg had mended, they would begin the long overland trek that would carry them out of the wilderness. Her husband would not deprive her of this meager consolation but he realized that until the long rainy season was ended—and it had just set in, in earnest—they must remain in their lonely outpost.

They were both astounded and in a measure glad, to hear young David declare that he liked the jungle and had no desire to leave it. The fact that he was thoroughly enjoying their enforced sojourn in the wilds lightened their own burden.

CHAPTER IV

THE JUNGLE TAKES ITS TOLL

IT was exactly a week since the mighty Zar had watched the strange bird come swooping down to rest in the clearing. Now curiosity stirred again in his mind. For a long while he hesitated; remembering the alien emotion he had felt for the first time at the sight of the grotesque, two-legged creature. Then impelled by a fascination he could not resist, he headed for the camp.

He had not travelled far when he came to an abrupt halt. His head came up and sniffed the air with flaring nostrils. The tip of his tail twitched when his nose told him that N'Jaga, the leopard, was already stalking in the same direction.

Zar's amber eyes gleamed with resentment. One peremptory roar to an-

nounce his coming—and N'Jaga would reluctantly relinquish the trail to his mighty overlord. A growl started deep in his throat, then died.

Zar's pride ruled the jungle but it did not rule his own cunning brain. Let N'Jaga stalk this strange prey. He would be content to wait—to watch—to learn.

His huge paws trod the jungle floor as silently as pads of velvet. His tawny body wove easily through the dense, tangled undergrowth, barely disturbing a leaf in his passing.

From the branches of a tall tree Nono, the monkey, saw him. Safe in the swaying tree top, he shrilled a warning to the jungle folk. Zar glanced up from slitted eyes, snarled and went on. A terrified bush rat scurried across his path and dived squeeling into the brush. Zar ignored the little creature with studied disdain.

The unfamiliar scent of man came first to warn him that he was nearing his destination. Treading yet more carefully, he wormed his way through a dense tangle and at last reached a point that gave him a broad view of the clearing.

The stricken bird still lay where it had fallen. From a queer shelter beneath its outspread wing a fascinating sound—Constance's voice—issued occasionally. Zar tilted his majestic head to one side and listened. Before the shelter the two-legged creature squatted on his haunches, busily engaged with something. And wonder of wonders, six feet away from him a smaller creature—undoubtedly the cub of the larger one—gambled about.

Zar's keen eyes missed no detail of the scene. Thirty yards off to his left he made out the form of N'Jaga, lying crouched on his belly, his spotted shape barely distinguishable in the dense brush, his small eyes riveted on the groop in the clearing. Zar was content

to lie still and watch, only the very tip of his tail moving.

The strange cub continued to scurry about. His movements carried him farther and farther away from his busy father—closer and closer to the spot where N'Jaga lay like a motionless statue. Zar sensed what would happen, but he did not stir. The cub was not his. No such emotion as pity had ever stirred his stout heart. Life is cheap in the jungle and no vestige of regret marks a creature's passing.

So he watched N'Jaga tense his springy muscles, saw the stupid cub linger a fatal moment near the edge of the jungle. N'Jaga could wait no longer for the toothsome tid-bit to come even closer to his lair. With an ear-splitting scream he sprang, his sleek, spotted body hurtling out of the undergrowth.

Even as his first bound covered half the distance between him and the startled cub, a cry of terror rang out from the shelter under the wing.

"John—David! Quick!" It floated across the clearing on a quivering note.

Quicker than the lightning strikes, the two-legged creature snatched up a long stick that lay near him, jumped up and pointed the stick at the bounding N'Jaga.

There was a roar and a pale flash, then a puff of smoke wafted from the end of the stick. N'Jaga halted in mid-stride, screamed. Zar saw a streak of bright crimson appear on his spotted hide as he whirled to face this new menace.

THE two-legged creature did not run. The stick pointed at N'Jaga again. And for the first time, the leopard felt the strange fear that the wiser Zar had sensed a week before. Crouching, his tail lashing, he hesitated. And then, instead of charging in fury at the father of the cub, he suddenly wheeled around and vanished like a yellow streak.

The salty tang of blood came faintly to Zar's nostrils. Silent as a great shadow he bellied backwards. And while N'Jaga crept off to some quiet spot to nurse his wound, Zar glided back into the jungle fastness.

The scene that he had just witnessed was engraved indelibly on his memory. The stick had been pointed at N'Jaga. There had been a roar and a flash of fire. And N'Jaga had limped as he fled from the encounter. Zar had been wise, indeed, when he had been content to lie hidden and watch. His instinctive hatred for this two-legged creature was not lessened. But now it was tempered by a deep respect.

When the leopard had vanished, John Rand hurried to young David, snatched him up and carried him back to his anxious mother. To his amazement, his son looked at him from reproachful eyes.

"You hurt him," he accused. "You hurt him, daddy. Now he won't come back—never—never."

In silence, Rand looked at his child. When the huge leopard, with its jaws agape, had leaped at him, David had not shown even the slightest, instinctive fear.

Rand recalled the youngster's delight in the monkeys and birds and lizards with which the clearing abounded. And now a strange thought flitted through his mind. It was so elusive that he could not quite grasp it; but had he been able to do so, he would have realized that to young David the beasts of the jungle were companions and friends. Something within the child responded to them and he knew them, trusted and loved them.

Instead of trying to answer his son's accusation, he patted the youngster's head and for the rest of the day, he was a very thoughtful man.

And so, with death ever at their elbows, Rand and his family continued

to survive in the heart of the African wilderness. Roots, berries, strange fruits and the game which was always plentiful fed them. Every day parts of the wrecked plane were added to the original lean-to, until they were housed in a safe and comfortable dwelling. Water and fuel were within easy reach. David's skin bronzed until in the tattered remnants of his clothing he resembled a sturdy young savage. And while his parents became merely reconciled to their strange environment, he fell more and more under its spell.

Boredom never existed there, for constant dangers kept them ever on the alert. There was the time when David's restless feet took him too close to a slender, emerald-green snake, sunning itself on a tangle of roots. The reptile hissed a sibilant warning and then uncoiled with the suddenness of a broken spring. Swift as it struck, John Rand was a fraction of a second faster. He knocked the youngster sprawling as he leaped forward and the snake buried its dripping fangs in the tough leather of his high boots. Snatching the automatic from his hip, he fired three times in rapid succession and the snake threshed wildly in its death throes.

Again David reproached his father and no graphic description of the reptile's deadliness could change the boy's attitude. He mourned the passing of a fellow denizen of the wild.

They heard the distant trumpeting of an elephant herd and one day Rand, hunting in the jungle depths for game, was startled by a loud crashing through the lower branches of the trees. The sound was made by a tribe of great apes on their migration to new feeding grounds and twice he caught glimpses of dark, flat-nosed faces peering through the leafy boughs.

At night great cats prowled on padded feet around their dwelling. They could hear the sniffing of curious

and hungry beasts and the loaded rifle was never far beyond Rand's reach.

OFTEN they laid awake far into the night while in low voice Constance made plans for the day when she would be able to travel. To please her, Rand discussed in detail their possible routes, the equipment they would need and the minimum amount of provision they could carry. But he was grateful for the darkness that hid his face from hers, while she talked of Cairo, of friends in far-off London, and in Johannesburg.

For she was mending slowly—very slowly. And though the broken bones were knitting at last, she was growing wan and weak. Knowing the courage and the will within her slender body, he blamed it on the enervating climate. The damp, steaming miasma seemed to sap all strength from her. She grew thin and violet shadows made hollows under her eyes.

His fears for her were justified. The day came when she complained of a racking headache. And soon she was consumed by a raging fever.

Rand was dismayed. He had seen the ravages of mysterious tropical maladies before. He dosed her from the quinine supply of the medical kit that he had carefully guarded. But her weakened body did not respond. Shaken by alternate spells of burning fever and chills that made her tremble from head to foot, she grew steadily worse. Rand stayed constantly by her side and David listened wide-eyed when his mother began to ramble incoherently about the home that she had left.

Late one night, after a fitful, restless sleep, she woke to find her husband still keeping vigil beside her. She smiled up at him.

"Faithful John," she murmured.

Her voice was low and husky, but sane. Rand placed a cool hand on her fevered brow.

"You're better," he said eagerly. "You know, I think you've passed the crisis."

Constance smiled again but shook her head. A strange soft light glowed in her deep-set eyes. "No, John. I—I'm going to die—very soon."

An expression of anguish crossed his face, then he forced a laugh from his lips. "Nonsense." He leaned over and pressed his face to hers. "You're not going to die. You can't leave me—I need you," he said huskily.

She stroked his bearded cheek with tender fingers. "I don't want to leave you. It's God's will. I'm not afraid—for myself." She slipped the wedding ring from her wasted finger on to his. "My dearest possession. I want you to wear it for me, John, always," she said softly.

Rand felt of the smooth, gold band. Though he could not read the inscription engraved on the inside of it, he knew it by heart: "*From John Rand to Constance Dean.*"

Constance went on, her voice sinking to a whisper, so weak that it was barely audible. It seemed to Rand's straining eyes as though a shadow flitted across her face. "John," she managed feebly, "You'll take good care of David—won't you?"

"With my life," he answered.

She smiled weakly up at him. "I knew you'd say that." Her straying fingers sought and found his. With the contented sigh of a tired child going to sleep, she closed her eyes.

John Rand remained frozen at her side, holding the still figure in his arms.



CHAPTER V

THE END OF THE RAINS

JOHN RAND never knew that the hyena and jackal were prowling outside his rude shelter; never knew when the stealthy approach of Zar sent them slinking into the brush.

If he had known, he would not have cared.

Morbidly he toyed with the idea of ending it all, there by the side of his wife. He was tired, weary. Life held no meaning for him, had no purpose now that Constance was gone.

Then the cry of his son calling out in his sleep for a mother who would never answer again, brought him back to sanity. If not for himself, he had to live for David. It was enough that he had the death of his wife on his hands. The boy must live. For Constance's sake. It was her dying wish. The boy's name had been the last to pass her lips before a merciful God had taken her from her sufferings to the eternal peace of heaven.

That thought—that conviction—fortified Rand, eased the poignant pain of his grief. He would live for his son, dedicate his life to the boy. For in him the flesh and blood of Constance were resurrected.

For the first time in many years John Rand prayed—prayed to the God, who in his infinite wisdom had created man as well as the savage beasts that roamed the jungle. His words were humble, penitent. He asked nothing for himself; only for the strength, the courage and the cunning to survive for his son and to eventually win back with him to civilization.

Rand did not sleep that night and it was not until the first pale light of dawn lit up the east that he stirred from the side of his wife. He had much to do.

First was the heart breaking task of fashioning a coffin from the fabric wings of the plane. It was crude at the very best, no more than a canvas covering for the lovely body. But he could not bring himself to commit his wife to the raw earth, uncovered.

David watched him from wide, scared eyes as he worked. "Mummy sick?" he asked in a small, hushed voice.

Rand turned to him, placed a gentle hand on his tousled head. "No, son," he answered softly. "Mummy is sick no longer. All her troubles are over. She has gone to heaven. God has taken her from us."

Little David smiled happily at the mention of the Diety. "God is good," he said, expressing the fundamental philosophy behind all true religion. "He won't let mummy cry any more."

Rand swept up the youngster in his arms and crushed him to his breast. Emotion gripped him and it was a moment before he could speak. "Amen to that, son," he cried reverently. "Yes, God is good. Mummy will cry no more."

David was satisfied with that and scampered cheerily about the clearing while his father labored over the grave. For a shovel he had nothing better than the jagged end of a shattered spar from the plane, but the ground was soft from the rains and his labor was one of love.

By noon his work was done. Calling David to him, he made his way slowly to the lean-to. There, with tender arms he picked up the shrouded body and with his son following after him, started back for the shallow grave.

Never had the heart of darkest Africa witnessed such a strange funeral procession. The jungle seemed to have stopped breathing while it watched.

Before the raw hole in the ground, Rand crushed his wife to him, while his lips moved in prayer. Then, reverently, he lowered his burden to its final,

earthly resting place. He had fashioned a pillow of wild flowers for Constance's head; and now with David at his side they dropped orchids into the open grave.

Rand dropped down to his knees. "Pray, son," he said in a choked voice.

DAVID knelt down beside him and pressed the palms of his hands together as his mother had taught him. From wide eyes he looked trustingly into the blue of heaven. "I know you'll take care of mummy, God. And thank you."

There was such a simple, all-embracing faith behind the words that Rand felt sure that God had heard. He felt better.

"Amen," he said.

Slowly he filled in the grave and together with his son piled rocks over the little mound. From parts of the shattered propeller a cross was fashioned and placed at the head of the grave. And thus ended the saddest task it had ever been John Rand's misfortune to perform.

It was not until the following morning that Rand felt the full shock of his loss. He could not believe that Constance had gone from him forever, that never again would her eyes smile into his.

For the next week he brooded for long hours over her grave, heaping it high with jungle flowers, while all unheeded his son chased gaudy-winged butterflies around the clearing.

It was only the urgent demands of David's body that brought him out of his reveries. And then only long enough to satisfy the youngster's need for food.

Night brought him no surcease. Cradling the boy in his arms he would throw himself on the rude couch in the lean-to and in vain woo sleep.

One night prowling jackals about the grave sent him leaping from the shelter.

Snatching a glowing brand from the low burning fire he charged into the night. He was consumed by an insensate, unreasonable fury. Not that! Anything but that! The thought of Constance's body despoiled by noisome beasts horrified him—became an obsession that haunted him.

The next day he heaped more stones upon the grave.

The rainy season was in full sway by now. Intermittently throughout the day and night the clearing was drenched by heavy deluges. They came sudden, without warning, as if some celestial gardener had opened a valve in heaven.

And then, two weeks after Constance had died, David fell sick. He had caught some strange jungle fever that sent up his temperature to perilous heights.

The boy's illness was the one thing that could have moved Rand from his lethargy, brought him back to reality and to his responsibilities to his son. For the first time he realized how he had neglected those responsibilities; how, in his selfish sorrow he had violated the last promise he had made to Constance.

His heart turned sick as he listened to the boy's childish prattle in delirium. If David died . . . but he did not dare think of that.

For three days and nights, with no more than a moment's snatched sleep, he nursed the youngster. No mother could have shown more care, more tenderness or patience. And then, on the morning of the fourth day, the fever was gone as suddenly as it had come. Sane-eyed, David smiled up into his father's face and asked for food.

The supply of powdered milk had long since been used. Now, with a prayer of thanks on his lips, Rand stirred up the fire, picked up the rifle, patted the boy reassuringly on the head and crept cautiously from the lean-to.

Deep in a cane-brake he took up his

post by the side of a game trail that led down to the edge of the lake. A leopard passed before the sights of his gun, drank its fill from the lake and departed, unmolested. The hyena, jackal and wild pig also drank their fill and went their way.

Then Rand tensed and his finger tightened on the rifle. An antelope with a fawn at her flank minced gingerly down the trail. The female's head was back and her velvet nostrils quivered as she sniffed the air.

Some sense of smell or sound, or perhaps a combination of both, flashed a warning of danger to her brain. She whinnied the alarm to her young—her haunches tensed for a spring. . . .

RELUCTANTLY, even though it was for his son, John Rand squeezed the trigger of his rifle. The mother antelope bounded forward for a sheer twenty feet, but the bay fawn did not follow after her. As if its slender, dainty legs had suddenly turned to water, it crumpled in the center of the trail.

And from deep in the jungle, challenging the crack of the rifle, came Zar's rumbling roar. Many times he had watched the two-legged creature of the clearing with the strange, shiny stick in his hand. Many times he had seen him point that stick at some wild thing of the jungle. The stick would bark. And as night followed day, the animal it was pointed at would drop.

Zar could not understand the magic of this, but he feared. And because he feared he hated. The two-legged creature that looked like N'Guru, could deal death at a distance!

Zar roared again and from a side trail stalked Rand as he carried the fawn back to the lean-to.

That day and the day after, David gained strength on strong meat broth. By the end of the week he was himself.

Though the episode had turned out happily enough, it brought Rand to a fuller realization of the dangers that confronted himself and his son. Not only must they be eternally on guard for prowling beasts, but they had a more insidious enemy to face. One that was unseen—that struck silently, without warning—fever!

He was increasingly anxious to win back to civilization. But the fact that the rainy season was then at its height made the attempt impracticable if not impossible. If he had been alone he might have ventured it with the chances fifty-fifty that he won through. But with David, the long trek would be out of the question.

Much as he hated the enforced delay, caution dictated that course. And there were other deciding factors. By the time the rainy season came to an end, David would be months older. In the comparative safety of their camp he would become hardened, jungle wise, immune to tropical fevers, against their long trek through the trackless wilderness.

And then there was the added consolation that while they waited, he would be near Constance's grave.

In short, Rand resigned himself to three months of waiting. He determined, however, that at the first sign of a let-up in the rains, they would set forth.

In preparation for that day he studied for long hours the large map of the Dark Continent that had been tacked to the dashboard of his plane. As close as he could calculate, he had cracked up some two degrees south of the equator, between the 25th and 28th meridians, east.

Approximately two hundred miles to the east lay Lake Kivu. From there it would be comparatively easy to travel down the Ruizi River to Lake Tanganyika, the furthest outpost of the white man. If, on the other hand, he went west, he should reach the Congo River

within a hundred miles; and from thence, another trek of a hundred miles paralleling the stream due north should bring him to a tiny Belgian settlement.

There was little to choose between either course. Each offered the same danger of savage man and savage beast to every heart-breaking mile. Rand decided to wait the moment of his departure before making his decision.

The days dragged slowly by into weeks; the weeks into months. He took the enforced delay with a stoic calm and marveled at the sturdy muscles developed in the legs of his son—at the affinity the youngster had developed with the forbidding jungle.

David knew where the sweetest smelling flowers bloomed for Constance's grave; where the most luscious fruit ripened to satisfy their appetites. He made friends with the smaller animals, imitated the raucous cries of birds and strode the jungle trails as unafraid as Zar, before the coming of man.

As the rainy season dragged towards a close at last, Rand made his simple preparations for the long trek. He was increasingly sparing of the bullets for the rifle, hunting only for the necessity of food. And of each kill, a portion was dried to be taken along on the journey.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM

THE rains had decreased now, from a steady, twenty-four hour drumming to two heavy downpours—one in the early morning, the other at eventide. Rand's spirits picked up at the early prospect of taking the trail. The impenetrable jungle wall that surrounded the little clearing was a challenge to him—to his strength, courage and fortitude—and eagerly he accepted it.

Not that he minimized the dangers that would confront him and his son, but he had faith in himself, confidence in his ability to win through. Somehow he had the feeling that the spirit of his dead wife would watch over them, guide their faltering steps back to safety.

His heart was heavy at the thought of abandoning Constance's grave to the jungle, but he was fortified by the knowledge that she would have had it so. Mentally he made the resolution that once he returned his son to civilization, he would immediately form an expedition and head once more back for the clearing that had been his home for the past six months. He would disinter Constance's body then and bring it back with him for proper burial in the neat, trim cemeteries of her homeland.

The day came at last when Rand spoke of his hopes and plans to his son. It was towards sunset and the day had been marked by but one brief shower in the early morning.

"Well, son," he began in a cheery voice, "tomorrow we start for home."

"Home?" echoed David with a puzzled frown.

"Yes. Back to civilization. Back to the land of people—white people. Street cars, electric lights, trains," elaborated Rand enthusiastically.

"What's that?" asked David, still puzzled.

Rand smiled wryly to himself. In six short months—though they were comparatively a long span in the youngster's life—his son had completely forgotten everything he had once known of civilization. The most common words of civilized society conjured up no corresponding association in his mind. Such was the blessing of boyhood. An experience that might have blighted a more mature mind had left him untouched. He had taken the hardships and dangers of their enforced sojourn in the wilds as the natural manner of life. More, he

had enjoyed it. And if his sturdy brown body was any evidence, he had thrived on it.

The terror and tragedy that had attended their exile had left him untouched. He was a little animal, as quick and animated as the monkeys that sported in the trees; as natural and untrammelled by the restricting influences of civilization as ever man had been before.

Rand envied him his simple acceptance of his mother's death; his easy forgetfulness of sorrow and grief.

"Yes, son," he began again, "tomorrow we start for home. Don't you remember? The house we lived in before we came here?"

David shook his head. His face was serious and frowning. "Where's that?" he demanded.

Rand flung his arm to the south. "Way, way off in there, beyond the lake," he answered. "A long way—a hard way. You'll get tired—we'll both get tired," he corrected. "And maybe we'll be hungry. But you'll take it like a man, eh, son?"

YOUNG David felt no elation at the prospect of leaving his beloved clearing. But at this last appeal of his father—man to man—he responded. "I'll take it like a man, dad," he repeated.

Rand clapped him fondly on the shoulder. "I knew you would."

David's brows screwed up in concentration and he thought for a moment. "We leave mummy here?" he asked at last.

A momentary shadow passed over Rand's face. "Yes, son, for a little while. But we'll come back for her." He cupped his boy's palm in his right hand, picked up the rifle in his left. "Come, we'll say good-bye to mummy for a little while. We'll leave some flowers on her grave."

They left the lean-to and slowly, hand in hand, walked across the clearing towards the little mound at the far side. They had tended it faithfully every day and it was covered with a blanket of hibiscus.

The grave held little significance for David's immature mind and the placing of flowers upon it was but a pleasant ritual that had to do with the gathering of wild, sweet smelling blooms.

Rand placed his offering on the grave, then bowed his head in prayer. For a long time he communed with his wife—so long that he failed to note the bank of ominous black clouds that were massing in the west. He wasn't aware that the sun had taken on a peculiarly brassy glare—that the myriad tongues of the jungle were stilled. Not a breath stirred, not a leaf rippled. The birds and monkeys had fallen strangely silent and all life seemed suspended as if waiting with bated breath for the stroke of doom.

The first intimation of danger that Rand had was a sudden souging high in the tree tops above him. He looked up quickly in alarm. Not a tree stirred as yet and as he watched, the bank of black clouds in the west rolled across the sky as if poured from an inkpot, blotting out the sun.

Then, with a sudden blast, the storm broke. The wind screamed on a high, off-key wail. In perfect unison the towering trees of the jungle groaned and keeled far over. Jagged bolts of vivid purple rent the heaven and flashed luridly from sky to earth. With the first flash of lightning the rain came. It descended in a blinding, driving sheet as solid as a wall.

In the first second of the storm's fury Rand and his son were drenched. The screaming wind snatched their breath away and the air was filled with hurtling limbs and branches torn from the trees. All about them the mammoth baobab trees plunged and fell, smitten by the

jagged bolts from above.

Rand swept young David to his arm and plunged for the shelter of the tall trees that bordered the clearing.

"It's all right, son," he shouted in David's ear, above the fury of the storm. "This will be over in a few minutes. It's the last twister of the rainy season—and the worst."

David did not answer. He was too fascinated by the storm.

They crouched there together on the edge of the clearing, lashed by the wind and the rain. The intermittent flashes of light lit up their faces with brilliant purple. Then, a second later, a sizzling bolt directly above them blinded them completely. The roaring clap of thunder that followed it immediately was equally as effective in deafening them.

If it had not been for these two factors, Rand would have known that the giant baobab tree, under which they had sought shelter, had been smitten—would have known that even with the lightning's flare it was crashing down on them.

Too late he realized their peril. It was the crash of the smaller trees about them, splintered like match wood by the fall of the towering baobab, that first told him of imminent peril. He glanced up once hastily and his heart constricted in his throat. The mammoth trunk of the tree was plunging straight down for them.

HE acted instinctively in the emergency. With a mighty thrust he flung David from him, clear of the path of the crashing destruction, then leaped far to one side. He succeeded in escaping the solid bole of the tree, which would have crushed the life from his body. But an outflung branch of the toppling giant crashed into the back of his head and sent him spinning drunkenly forward.

A bomb exploded inside his skull. He

staggered wildly, dropped his rifle, flung out his arms to regain his balance, failed and plunged face down to the jungle floor.

How long he lay there, John Rand never knew. Slowly, painfully he crawled back to consciousness. He was first aware of an angry rumbling in his ears which he confused with the fury of the storm that had been raging. A moment before? It seemed so to him. In reality it was a matter of hours.

And the rumble was not thunder. It was Zar's voice, venting his hate, as he lashed his tail in the brush twenty yards from the clearing.

Rand was next conscious of something tugging at his shirt and an insistent small voice drilling into his ears.

"Get up, daddy. Get up! I'm hungry."

He opened his eyes and stared blinking up into the small, tired face of his son. The storm had long since died out. From the vast dome of heaven a million winking stars looked down on the small jungle clearing.

"Daddy sleep?" asked David.

Rand brushed a hand across his eyes, staggered up to his feet. "Why, yes, I must have been, son." Zar's roar, so close at hand that he could almost feel the hot breath of it, brought him back to the reality of the moment. He stooped down swiftly, snatched up his rifle from the ground, then clasped David's hand firmly in his own. "Come on, son," he urged. "We got to get out of this."

Swiftly he made his way back to the lean-to. And a few minutes later, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened that day—as if he had never planned to start the long trek back to civilization on the morrow—he stirred up the camp fire and went casually about the routine business of preparing the night's meal.

"We're going home tomorrow?"

asked David when the meal was over.

Rand looked at him with puzzled eyes. "Home, son?" he echoed. Then he threw out his arm in a wide gesture that took in the rude lean-to, the clearing and the encroaching jungle beyond. "Why this is home, son," he said patiently. "This clearing, here, in the jungle. Where your mother is."

David smiled up at him. "I'm glad," he said simply.

Rand threw a protecting arm around his sturdy shoulder, returned the smile. "Of course you are, son."

CHAPTER VII

ZAR THE MIGHTY

JOHAN RAND never recovered mentally from the blow that the falling jungle giant had struck him. Though rational in every other respect, to the end of his days he labored under the delusion that the jungle was his home. He liked to believe that this tract of wilderness belonged to him and since no one was there to refute him, the notion grew until it became an absolute conviction.

The outward manifestations of civilization fell rapidly from him. His beard became a luxuriant growth that Zar the lion might have envied. His supply of ammunition became exhausted and in its place he managed to fashion ingenious weapons from the remains of the plane. Together he and David survived—and thrived.

At the age of eight, David was a husky lad, already destined to become taller and mightier than his powerful father. Some latent impulse had made John Rand teach his son to read and write. With the aid of a charred stick, blackened by fire, David had reluctantly learned his A B C's. But even such simple schooling was not to his liking.

Clad simply in a soft hide draped about his loins, equipped with a crude but efficient knife, a long bow, a quiver of arrows and a stout spear fashioned by his father, he preferred to roam the forest. He could swim like Nyassa the fish, climb with all the agility of Nono the monkey. With any of his weapons he could strike as swiftly as Sinassa the big snake. He knew now why his father had fired at N'Jaga the leopard and why he had killed the emerald green reptile. He accepted the code of the jungle. Kill only when necessary—for food, or for one's own life.

He had been only three on that fateful day when their plane had crashed to the clearing. All details of his life before that day faded swiftly from his memory. And they were never recalled, for John Rand never mentioned them. David never learned of other white men, of big ships that sailed the seas, of speeding trains and crowded cities. Such things were buried in John Rand's past and such words never crossed his lips.

Only the lonely grave of Constance remained as a symbol of what had been. It became part of John Rand's obsession to linger near that hallowed spot, to spend long brooding hours there and to protect it from the ravages of weather and prowling beast.

Occasionally the sight of the grave brought a puzzled look to David's eyes. He would screw up his face and try to grasp a memory that eluded him. But in the end he gave up the effort and the vague thoughts came no more to plague him.

The early kinship that he had felt for the animals had grown with the years. He had met and made friends with many of them. They talked with him and soon he began to understand them. He learned, with strange guttural sounds, to imitate their language and from that day a new and happier life

opened up before him.

Nono, the little monkey, was his constant companion. He would snatch things when David was not looking, scamper up into the topmost branches and taunt his friend. When David shook his fist and laughed, Nono would toss sticks at him. Then, in a sudden change of mood, he would scramble down again, swing lightly up onto David's shoulder and cling to the boy's neck with spidery hands.

No longer was the lad a helpless youngster who needed constant looking after. Wise in the ways of the jungle, David went off alone on long expeditions into the forest. He had his first sight of Trajah, the elephant, and wondered what it would be like to climb upon that towering gray back and ride in state through the jungle. Some day, he vowed, Trajah would also become his friend and his desire would be gratified. He met Quog, the wild pig, and stayed that beast's startled flight with a guttural call. While swimming in the lake, he was in turn startled by a great beast that rose snorting from the shallows. And so he made the acquaintance of Wal-lah, the hippopotamus.

ON many of these trips Nono accompanied him, sometimes riding on his shoulder, sometimes swinging through the vines and branches that overhung the jungle floor. And several times, though he did not know it, he had another companion. A flitting, tawny shape kept pace with him, silent as a shadow. Zar, the lion, had never forgotten the stick that spurted flame and roared. Neither had he forgotten his first instinctive knowledge that these strange two-legged creatures somehow menaced his jungle supremacy.

Still patient and watchful, biding his time, Zar had watched the cub grow to be big and strong. Some day, he sensed, the issue must be decided. No rival

must stand before him.

Sha, the lioness, his regal mate, was less cautious. Twice David had seen her, once departing gorged from a kill, another at twilight when she drank from the edge of the lake. Remembering the charge of N'Jaga, he realized that here was a still more formidable enemy. He fingered his crude weapons—and wondered.

But the gods of the jungle were nothing if not capricious. And the outcome of the first meeting between Zar and David was a surprising one.

It had been a hot, sultry day. There was meat at the camp to last them several days and a fire already prepared against the coming night. John Rand was busy fashioning a new spear. Young David, footloose and fancy-free, had wandered deep into the jungle in the hope of finding Trajah the elephant.

His search had been unsuccessful. The sun dropped more swiftly toward the waiting mountain peak. A belated butterfly, large as a saucer and shimmering as a sapphire, floated across his path. A floating speck in the cloudless sky brought David's eyes upward. It circled downward in a tight spiral, grew larger as it descended. Then with wings slanted back Kru, the buzzard, dropped like a plummet toward the earth.

Curiously David veered off and made for the spot where Kru had landed. And a few moments later his arrival sent the ungainly bird flapping up from a carcass. The kill had been a small antelope and it was still fresh. Great chunks had been taken from one shoulder and haunch. And around the spot, the damp jungle floor was marked with the impressions of huge paws.

David dropped down to one knee and examined them. The pupils of his eyes, dilated and a strange tingling stirred at the base of his neck. For the impressions had been made by a lion pair, and the larger, those of the male, were of

monstrous size. Zar and his mate were in the vicinity.

David rose; cast a glance over his shoulder at the setting sun for his direction, and then proceeded, more cautiously now, toward the distant camp.

Twilight fell as he reached a swamp that he must traverse and he took to the lower branches of the trees. A good fifteen feet above the treacherous mire he traveled swiftly and safely, swinging from bough to bough as Nono had taught him; occasionally flying far through the air to catch the next stout limb.

Jacaru the crocodile slithered through the morass below him. Bats wheeled, ghost-like, past his head. In the dim light, sky, trees and underbrush were of a monotonous grayness. And the spell of the twilight, before the night came with its noisy life, lay like a hush over the land.

Then suddenly the stillness was rent by a mighty roar. And even before its echoes had died away, it came again.

David crouched on a swaying limb and listened. He knew that bloodcurdling sound—he had heard it many times before. Only the deep-throated bellow of Zar could wake such echoes in the jungle. But this time, there was a new note in the stentorian call. David's keen ears told him that and more. He would have sworn it—that note was fear.

THE roar had come from a spot not far before him. Without further hesitation, he redoubled his speed through the trees. And a moment later he halted in amazement.

For once the wise monarch of the jungle had erred—he had made a fatal misstep. Something far more treacherous than any living creature, had him in its grasp. Zar the mighty floundered in a patch of quicksand. And with each struggle to gain the safety of the bank,

his massive tawny body sank lower into the slimy depths.

David took in the scene with one swift, all-inclusive glance. On the bank, strange whines issuing from her throat, crouched Sha. Helpless, she watched the death struggles of her fallen lord, but she dared not venture toward him. All around the quicksand was solid, grass-tufted land. But Zar was up to his haunches now and he could not hope to gain it. Even in the murky light David could see the hopeless light in the lion's amber eyes—and he could not resist the forlorn appeal.

He dropped lightly down from the tree. Zar's struggles ceased for a moment as his head swung in that direction. Sha growled, her tail lashed and she tensed her muscles for a spring.

But the desperate need of his situation did something strange to Zar's brain. Whether he realized that no enemy would come to attack him now, already doomed as he was, or whether the low words that David called out to him conveyed an unmistakable note of friendliness, will never be known. But Zar growled a peremptory command at his mate and she subsided again, whining.

David worked swiftly. With his knife he slashed desperately at boughs and brush, seized a great armful of the fallen branches and thrust them out across the morass toward the helpless lion. Exerting all his magnificent strength, Zar drew his right forepaw free of the clinging sands. Digging into the boughs, he drew himself slowly forward.

But as his tremendous weight shifted upon them, the tangle of boughs sank slowly but surely into the quicksand. Hastily David slashed down more, added them as fast as he could work to Zar's sinking foothold.

It was a matter of minutes in actual time, but it seemed eternity to the

strange trio. Inch by inch Zar drew his tiring body from the quagmire that seemed reluctant to lose its prey. But David saw that they were cheating Death of its hold and he redoubled his efforts. And at last the lord of the jungle crawled across the settling boughs and gained the bank.

For a long moment in the dying twilight they faced each other across the quagmire. Sha nuzzled her master's draggled mane. From glowing eyes Zar surveyed the man cub as he stood, straddle-legged and breathing heavily, beneath the tree from which he had dropped.

And there a strange pact of truce was made. Zar growled—a low, rumbling note that held no enmity. David gave guttural answer to show that he understood. And then as night fell, the great beast turned and with his mate at his side, stalked silently into the jungle.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ARROW STARTS A FEUD

A WEEK had passed since David's rescue of Zar and the truce between him and the lion. The sun had been up an hour and David and his father were exploring the swamp-lands in search of straight branches of the acaya tree to be hardened in a slow burning fire into arrows.

Their search had taken them farther from the clearing than usual. David was in the act of indicating a likely tree with an outstretched arm, when suddenly his head snapped back. His nostrils twitched. His sense of smell, keen as that of N'Jaga, had picked up the pungent odor of smoke.

He knew that their own camp fire had been put out before they had left the lean-to. And even if that had not been the case, they were too far from

the clearing for the scent of smoke to reach them.

Tilting back his head he scanned the tops of the trees towering above them.

Rand noted the rapt expression of his face and wonderingly followed the direction of his son's gaze. Keen as his own senses had been attuned to the jungle, they could not rival the youngster's. He, himself, had sensed no warning of danger. The face of the impenetrable jungle appeared the same to him as always—its sights, smells and sounds.

And then simultaneously they both saw it—a thin spiral of smoke that curled above the tree-tops. Young David made a guttural sound in his throat. Rand gripped the butt of his long spear with a fierce grip. He was assailed by a hundred conflicting emotions, none of which he could quite analyze. The sight of that smoke, from a campfire he knew was not his own, stirred dim memories in the back of his clouded brain. He frowned in his concentration as he tried to bring them to light but they eluded his mental grasp.

Then they were gone and Rand was clear eyed once more. The only emotion aroused in him by the sight of that smoke, was one of danger—one of outrage. Someone was encroaching on his kingdom—someone had stumbled perilously close to Constance's grave.

He made a warning signal of silence to the boy—a signal that was not needed—then lowering his spear to the ready, moved forward cautiously. He slipped between the boles of the giant trees without making a sound. And David followed, stepping where he stepped. Not a twig snapped beneath their feet; no leaf stirred at their passing. Zar could not have stalked his quarry more stealthily, more warily.

Long before their eyes could tell them anything, their ears warned them that whatever it was they were approaching, there were four of them. Outside of

his father, David had seen no other man for years. The dim remembrance of his soft faced mother was something that came to trouble him only in dreams. The possibility that there were other two-legged creatures like himself, had never occurred to him.

His thumb and forefinger held a long arrow taut against the string of his bow. He was prepared to see N'Guru and his tribe going through their strange rituals; or Chaka and his family of great apes dancing around a jungle drum. But he was not prepared for the sight that met his eyes a few moments later when they came to a slight opening in the trees, made by the gurgling passage of a small stream.

His father held up his hand in warning. They froze, shadows in the shadowy forest. Concealed behind the pendant foliage of a tree they peered into the clearing.

In the center was a small fire that sent a plume of smoke lazily upward. Near it was a strange shelter that resembled somewhat the lean-to in which he and his father lived. But it was not these things that held David's rapt attention. Squatted on his haunches before the fire, stirring something in a pot, was a man—a man like himself or his father—except for the fact that he was black. He was naked, save for a ragged cloth around his middle.

TWO more blacks were scooping up gravel from the bed of the stream in shallow pans. And standing over them, watching their labor, was still another man. But this one was white—and fat. He had a strange, domed covering on his head; strange wrappings encased his legs. And instead of the skin of the leopard or antelope, his body was covered with tight-fitting wrappings.

David studied these strange men, the first he had any knowledge of ever hav-

ing seen, with curious attention. His breast seethed with a welter of emotions he could not analyze. His first impulse was to run forward and greet them. But he had been schooled too long in the jungle to act rashly.

True, the men before him seemed harmless. There was not a weapon in sight. The revolver strapped to the white man's belt meant nothing to him. But he had long since learned that even the most harmless appearing animal has defenses and when attacked or surprised can prove dangerous.

With a sign that his son should stay where he was, Rand grasped his spear firmly in his hand and stepped out into the clearing. David watched him go from narrowed eyes and some instinct told him to keep the arrow fitted to the bow.

His father had covered half the distance to the stream before his coming was discovered. The black crouching over the fire looked up, saw the bearded giant striding across the narrow glade, cried out and toppled backward.

At the shrill cry of alarm the white man at the stream whirled, made a lightning movement towards his hip and, watching, David was surprised to see something bright and shiny flash in his hand. He, David, sensed that it was a weapon and the string of his bow became taut.

The two blacks at the stream crouched back; the white man took up a defensive attitude. A thrill of pride coursed through David's veins as he saw that his father never faltered. Looking neither to the right or left Rand made straight for the waiting trio at the water's edge.

Though he could not make out the words, David knew when they began to talk. His father's arm flung out in a wide gesture that embraced the jungle about them, then pointed commandingly to the east.

The fat white man answered. His father spoke again. Then they were both talking at once and from their animated gestures David knew that their words were spoken in anger.

Then, as he watched, the white man snatched one of the pans from the blacks and held it up for Rand's inspection. He talked rapidly, gesticulated wildly.

But John Rand was not impressed. With a sudden movement he dashed the pan to the ground and pointed again to the east.

No words were necessary to tell David that it was an order to leave. The white stranger listened in sullen silence—then he saw his father turn slowly on his heel and start back towards where he was hidden in the brush. He was proud of his father's arrogance in turning his back on an enemy; but even more surprised at his carelessness.

He became doubly watchful and a moment later he was thankful that he had. His father had taken but three strides from the stream when the fat stranger slowly raised the shining rod in his hand and pointed it at his back.

SOME dim memory of the past, when his father had pointed a shining stick at N'Jaga, galvanized David into action. His bow bent deep. The shaft of the arrow nestled against his ear for a fleeting moment, then sped forward.

John Rand was aware of a sudden humming beside his ear, then of a startled, guttural curse behind him. He whirled around. The face of the stranger was contorted in agony. Protruding from his upper right arm an arrow still quivered. His hand hung limp at his side and blood ran crazily between his fingers. And now those fingers slowly relaxed and opened and a heavy automatic revolver trickled from them to clatter metallically to the ground.

John Rand laughed shortly, swept his arm around at the jungle once more,

turned again on his heel and walked back to where his son lay hidden in the brush. But if David had seen the devils of hate leering out of the stranger's eyes, he would have fitted another arrow to his bow. And it would have found the fat white man's throat, instead of his upper arm.

Rand joined his son, expressed his thanks in the silent grip of his hand on David's arm and nodded his head towards the depths of the forest. As silently as they had come they faded into the murky depths.

Rand was more than usually silent that day, as he wrestled with the vague, disturbing thoughts in his brain. No word passed between him and his son concerning the incidents that had occurred that morning. It was not until after their evening meal that he brought up the subject.

For the past hour he had given particular attention to his weapons and now, satisfied that they were ready for any emergency, he spoke.

"This jungle is sacred to your mother, who lies buried here," he said grimly. "Remember that, son. It is ours—and no other man must be allowed to profane it. We shall keep it for ourselves—and for her."

David knew nothing of the faraway King who, according to the laws of the white man, counted their lonely wilderness amongst his possessions. He listened solemnly to his father's words, understood the trust imposed upon him and nodded gravely.

CHAPTER XIX

MURDER IN THE JUNGLE

THE white man whose arm had known the bite of David's arrow, had other ideas. Seated before his fire, he cursed one of the blacks for

his clumsiness when the fellow changed the dressing on his wound. Another managed to be busy at a safer distance.

Paul DeKraft, with a heart as greasy as the rolls of fat that covered his body, had a past as black as one of his natives and a future a little less promising. He was known and hated from the gaols of Sydney to the dives of Suez; from the gambling dens of Canton to the break-water of Cape Town. He had committed every crime on the statutes of the white man's law. And only his sly and cunning brain had saved his neck from the gallows.

Right now he was in the grip of a sullen rage that the natives knew and feared. He vented his indignation on the nearest and, though the black could understand only a word or two, he poured forth his tirade, highly spiced with profanity. He knotted his fist in his black beard.

"Emeralds, Bouala. Emeralds—that's what we've stumbled on in this God-forsaken stream. Emeralds worth a King's ransom." With a vicious, back-handed blow he sent the unfortunate Bouala spinning.

The black crashed to the ground, rubbed his cheek and said dutifully: "Emeralds. Yes, Inkosi."

DeKraft jumped to his feet. "And some half-crazy hermit thinks he can order me away from here, does he? Throws them on the ground as though they were pebbles. And then expects me to forget all about them. Hah!"

Bouala rolled over, but not quickly enough. DeKraft's heavy boot lashed out and brought a wail of agony as it landed. Then a soft footfall sounded in the darkness beyond the firelight and DeKraft's head snappet in that direction. Bouala took advantage of the moment and crawled painfully away.

The form of the third native advanced into the glow.

"Well, Mubangi?" said DeKraft.

"They sleep, Inkosi," answered the newcomer. "The crazy one and a boy."

DeKraft took a step toward him, his fists clenched. "You did not look—you were afraid to go near. There are others—other men." He raised his right fist in a threatening gesture.

Mubangi fell back. "I saw, Inkosi," he protested. "The man and the boy. No others."

DeKraft hesitated. His eyes were gleaming slits in the firelight. "They have guns?"

The native shook his head. "Mubangi saw no guns," he answered.

DeKraft fingered the crude bandage that encircled his aching arm. "Excellent," he murmured. "That will make it easier—much easier."

Then sinking down before the fire, he made plans that boded no good for John Rand and his son.

David, also, slept little that night. The day had been an eventful one, indeed. The sight of other men had started a long train of fancy in his brain. He wondered where they came from. Closing his eyes he recalled the strange garments of the white leader. He remembered the significant gestures that had passed between the latter and his father. He remembered, too, that John Rand had ordered them to leave his wilderness domain.

Before the dawn he rose, careful not to disturb his father, and slipped out into the clearing. Plunging into the jungle, he headed for the other camp.

The motive that sent him to spy upon the invaders was compounded of many things. For one thing, if the men were to return from whence they came, he might never see them again. And he would like to observe them while he could. For another, the white leader had attempted the life of his father. David was glad that he had been watchful then and he meant to keep his eyes on the stranger until he had gone well

beyond the borders of their wilderness home.

THE pebbles that John Rand had flung from the other's hand, he did not consider. To him, even more than to his father, they were just that—pebbles and no more. Nono occasionally picked up things that took his eye—bright colored feathers, smooth sticks, bits of shining rock. But that was because Nono was a monkey, and silly.

The grayness that precedes the dawn had lightened the jungle when David cautiously approached the camp. Parting a tangle of creepers, he peered out from his cover. The dying embers of a fire smouldered before the tent. No sound issued from within.

Were they sleeping? He cocked his head to one side and strained his ears. But the silence was profound. Raising his head, he sniffed of the damp air.

No scent of man carried to him. He looked puzzled. Had they departed already on their long journey? Strange that they should have left their possessions behind them. Unless John Rand's warning and David's arrow had instilled such a fear in their hearts that they had fled in haste.

Pushing through the vines, David cautiously approached the tent. It was empty, right enough. Curiously he fingered the stuff of which it was made before he ventured inside. There he examined the various things that belonged to the strange white man. A canvas cot puzzled him for long moments before he realized its use. He poked into a kit of eating utensils, peered into a box of cartridges, found a bottle of Holland gin.

The first two items he could make nothing of. Examining the latter, he accidentally pulled the cork. To him, the colorless liquid within was water. He raised the bottle to his lips and took a long swallow.

An agony of fire consumed his throat. The rare phenomenon of tears came to his eyes. The bottle slipped from his nerveless fingers and spilled over, as he spat to rid himself of the terrible stuff.

The lesson was well-learned and he tasted nothing more. He found a circular, shining disc and when he looked at it, he was astounded to see his own face look back at him. The reflection was far more clear than any he had seen in the smooth waters of the lake. He was fascinated by the mirror and would have taken it then and there, but he remembered Nono's penchant for glittering things and with a rueful smile at such foolishness, he laid it down again.

Leaving the tent, he headed back for his own camp. He would tell his father about the many and wonderful things that the strangers had left behind them. Perhaps his father would be able to tell him what they were and what they were used for.

Elated with his discovery, he moved along the jungle trail, swinging through the forest with an easy, deceptively fast stride. The first tinge of dawn was flaming in the east; about him the jungle stirred, whispered and came to life.

There was a care-free, abandoned song in David's heart as he neared the clearing. Then abruptly a staccato crack pulled him up in mid-stride. The song in his heart died. He sensed danger and fitted an arrow to his bow.

For a moment the explosive sound puzzled him. It was not the roar of any jungle beast, he knew, yet it was vaguely familiar. Then with sudden clarity he remembered — his mind flashed back to that distant day when his father had shot the bounding N'Ja-ga. A sound like the one he had just heard had accompanied the proceeding.

And hard on this realization, a second shot came from the direction of

the clearing.

David waited for no more. He bounded forward. Thoughts of his father gave an added speed to his legs. He broke through the jungle wall into the clearing and for once he threw caution to the winds.

One swift glance told him that the lean-to was being consumed by billowing flames. No one was in sight. With an agonized heart he jumped forward, at the thought that his father had been trapped in the burning shelter. Then a dark object, crawling along the ground a few feet from the lean-to, caught his eye.

With a decided shock he realized that it was his father and from Rand's slow, tortured movements it was obvious that he was wounded.

DAVID sped to him, dropped down beside him on the ground. "Father!" he cried. "What happened?" Then he saw that the front of Rand's chest was stained an ugly red.

At the sound of his son's voice, John Rand collapsed. Tenderly David lifted his head from the ground, stared down anxiously at his drawn face.

"You're hurt. Badly. What happened?" he whispered urgently.

With an effort, Rand forced open his eyes. A flood of relief passed over his face as he recognized his son; then the relief was followed swiftly by a look of apprehension. Weakly he grasped the boy's arm; his lips worked feverishly but no words came.

David sensed from the expression of his face and from his tense attitude that he was trying to transmit a warning. A warning against what? If he had seen the naked black even then sneaking around a corner of the burning lean-to, he would have known.

His head close to his father's lips, he was still trying to interpret the latter's mumbled words when something sharp

pricked him at the base of his spine.

He straightened slowly, pivoted even more slowly on the point of the spear in the black's hand. He recognized the native at once as one of the men he had seen at the camp of the fat white man.

With his fists clenched impotently at his sides, he glared at the native. He knew what that spear was, pricking now into his belly, and coolly he calculated his chances against it. But before he could act, the black called out and to his surprise the fat white man followed by two other natives, came on the run from the far side of the burning shelter. And in the fat white man's hand was a long, shining stick.

It was all very clear to David, then, what had happened. This fat, two-legged creature had wounded his father—with the stick. He—David—was consumed by an all-embracing hate and his fingers crept to the knife tucked in his belt.

He ignored the spear still pricking his middle and confronted the white man. "Fat-Face has wounded my father," he said coolly. "And for that, Fat-Face shall die."

Paul DeKraft rocked back on his heels and gave vent to a raucous laugh. "Spunky, eh? But you're wrong, kid. It's the other way around. *I'm* going to kill *you*, see? I don't want no witness to this little scene this morning—and dead men tell no tales." He laughed again. "I don't know who you or your father are—daffy, both of you—but you're in my way. It's the only way out, kid."

David only half understood the meaning of his words. He only knew that Fat-Face had wounded his father and now intended to kill him. In his arrogant youth he laughed at the idea. Coolly he measured the fat man from narrowed eyes and knew that he was his master.

But he had completely forgotten the

speed of the death lurking in the shiny stick.

Slowly he drew out his knife. The rifle whipped up.

There could have been only one possible outcome of the affair a moment later—David's death—if Fate had not intervened.

All unknown to the parties concerned, there had been another spectator to the grim drama. Crouched on the fringe of the clearing, his slitted amber eyes watching them, lay Zar. If David had forgotten the terrible destruction of the fire stick, not so the lion. And now this one was pointed at the man-cub, the creature who had rescued him from the quicksands.

A low growl rumbled in Zar's throat. Then with a mighty roar, he leaped into the clearing. At the first note of his challenge, the native with the spear stepped hastily back.

DeKraft whirled. A lion, bigger than any he had ever seen, was plunging straight for him. Hastily he raised the rifle; hastily he fired. Too hastily—he realized bitterly a moment later. He saw his bullet kick up a cloud of dust by the side of the lion's head, saw the jungle lord, jaws agape, loom ever larger before him.

DeKraft knew that he would not have time to reload before the sabre claws and dripping fangs of the lion sank deep into his flesh. Death touched at his craven heart. With one coordinated movement he grasped his native spearman and threw the screaming black straight into the path of the charging lion.

WAITING for no more, he turned on his heel and fled across the clearing on the heels of the other two.

The black spearman went down before Zar's charge like a sack of straw. There was a lightning movement from the lion's forepaw and the unfortunate

black lay disemboweled.

Satisfied with his work thus far, Zar propped his forefeet on the native's chest and threw back his head. The roar of the male lion who has made his kill, rumbled through the forest.

Crashing heavily through the undergrowth, ever further away from the clearing, DeKraft heard and wiped the sweat from his brow. Then a smile curled at his greasy fat lips. True, he had failed to kill the brat of the mad jungle hermit. But he had every confidence that the lion would take care of that oversight. He was well content.

Once Zar had proclaimed his might over the dead native, he swung his majestic head slowly about and surveyed the clearing. It was deserted save for the man-cub and his father. The bearded one lay prone on the ground and Zar knew that he was wounded.

He roared once to say that he had fulfilled his obligation and that there was nothing more for him to do. Then slowly, his tufted tail switching from side to side, he walked to the edge of the clearing with majestic stride and disappeared.

John Rand had fainted from loss of blood at the moment that Zar had charged. He regained consciousness a few minutes later, with David leaning over him, forcing cool water between his lips.

With an effort he swung his head and looked about the clearing.

David understood his unspoken question. "Gone," he said tersely. "Zar killed one of the blacks and scared the others off."

Rand smiled feebly. "Zar the lion, eh—your friend?"

David nodded. "Drink now, father," he ordered.

But John Rand knew that he was beyond all aid. "No use, son," he said. "Too late. I'm dying . . . I'm going to join your mother."

His eyes closed and David's heart was swept by an anguish of sorrow. His world seemed to be crumbling about him and he could not speak. After a moment his father's eyes fluttered open again.

With fast-ebbing strength, Rand tugged at the narrow gold band on his little finger. He succeeded in removing it at last and with a trembling hand, slipped the loop onto one of David's fingers.

"Your mother's wedding ring," he gasped. "Keep it—to remember her by." He spoke through a breaking bubble of blood. "And David—boy, bury me by her side in the clearing. She was—she was an angel."

For the last time John Rand looked into the eyes of his son and smiled. Then his chin dropped forward on his chest and with the simple conviction that he would join Constance in the Great Beyond, he died.

CHAPTER X

KA-ZAR, BROTHER OF ZAR

THE death of his father marked a definite turning point in David's life. He had just turned thirteen at the time and in those few minutes late that afternoon, as he stood with bowed head at the fresh-filled grave, he definitely made the transition from boyhood to manhood.

He was on his own, now, alone in the heart of a vast and savage wilderness. The responsibilities to survive—the effort, the brain and the brawn and the cunning, devolved squarely upon his shoulders. No longer would his father make decisions for him; no longer would his father step to the front when danger was near. He was the master of his fate.

In most respects he was admirably

equipped to survive against the terrible odds against him. In stature he was a man full grown, with a body superb and flawless. His muscles were as supple as N'Jaga's and he was as quick to strike as Zar when danger threatened. His eyes were as keen as those of Pin-dar, who sighted his prey from a mile in the sky. And save for the antelope, no thing that stalked the jungle had a keener sense of smell or hearing than he.

The jungle and the beasts that lived in it, he knew like the palm of his hand. He could swing swiftly through the trees like the apes; or with his nose close to the ground he was as sure on the trail as Sha, mistress of the mighty Zar.

All these things were in David's favor. But whether he had the savage heart, to kill without regret, was yet to be proved. Save in one respect. Fat-Face!

Hate clouded his vision as he stepped from the grave with Zar at his side. His judgments had never been schooled by contacts with civilization. His emotions had been completely decivilized by ten years in the jungle fastness. Of the things that belonged to civilized society he had no standard of comparison.

The fat white man had killed his father, brutally and without reason. Therefore there would be an undying feud between him and the white man and all the white man's tribe.

Until the blazing sun sank down behind the volcanic cone in the west, he hovered near the twin graves of his parents, the only humans he had ever known and loved. Manfully, mutely he struggled with his grief, blind to the life that flowed about him unruffled, unconcerned as if murder had not been committed in the clearing a few hours before.

And ever by his side strode Zar, watchful, wary, lest N'Jaga take advantage of the moment and strike the man-

cub in his hour of blind grief.

In his simple heart Zar had some vague understanding of the emotion that filled the man-cub. He expressed his sympathy with an occasional rumble in his throat, at which times David would run the hard knuckles of his fist from the top of the lion's skull to the tip of his blunt nose.

The twilight fell and still David lingered near the graves. The lean-to that had been the only home he remembered, was now but a heap of ashes. He recalled the tent at the other camp. It was doubtless there, intact. But something deep within him rebelled at the thought of occupying the home of the hated white man.

Zar sensed his uncertainty. With a low, guttural call, the lion walked toward the fringe of the jungle. Six paces away he stopped, looked back over his shoulder. Slowly David walked up to join him. But when he reached the lion's side, Zar moved off yet another half dozen paces.

Then David realized that Zar was leading him somewhere. He hesitated but a moment. The clearing held nothing but memories for him now. He made a whining sound to show that he understood, then keeping pace with his tawny friend, he followed him into the jungle.

THEY traveled swiftly and silently through the gathering darkness. But their journey was a long one and the moon was well up over the tree-tops when they reached their objective.

Screened as it was by bushes and an overhanging tree, David did not see the entrance to the cave until they were directly before it. A narrow space between two huge boulders, the opening appeared only as a blacker patch in the shadows. David had often searched for the lair of Zar and his mate and been unable to find it. Now, he came as an invited guest.

Zar halted, emitted a low growl. In answer, a tawny shape appeared in the opening.

When she saw the tall form beside her mate, Sha pulled back her lips and spat. Again Zar growled, deeper this time, and Sha subsided. Without another sound she moved backward into the shadows.

Zar stood still and looked at David. And the latter, knowing that he was expected to do so, dropped to all fours and crawled into the cave. The soft pad of Zar's footfalls followed him.

The rising moon sent its glow deeper into the opening and lightened the dark interior of the lions' lair to a drab grayness. Lying on the rocky floor, her narrowed eyes fastened unblinkingly on David, Sha again voiced her resentment. The female is indeed more savage than the male. By the very duties Nature has imposed upon her, she is more selfish, more wary and more jealous. The coming of this strange man-cub to her sacred home, roused instant antagonism within her.

Zar growled his displeasure at her attitude. And David, quickly learning the meaning of the various inflections of their language, joined the conclave.

At length a pact was made between them. Sha reluctantly agreed to accept David as a comrade, but he sensed that it would be a long time before the last vestige of suspicion would be entirely erased from her mind. Zar, on the other hand, showed the full measure of his gratitude for the time that the boy had saved his life. He accepted David as a blood brother, a relationship that each solemnly understood would be broken only by death itself. And in the language that would henceforth be his own, David was given a new name. From now on he would be known as Ka-Zar, brother of Zar the Mighty.

With the new name, began a new life. Ka-Zar soon lost the few vestiges of civ-

ilization that had survived his stay in the jungle. Now he became but another beast, pitting his superior intelligence against the reign of claw and fang. The language of his dead father, he relegated to a dim corner of his memory. Each day he became more proficient in the guttural speech of the animals. He walked where Zar walked, drank where the lion drank and together they shared their kill. And side by side they slept in the cave that Zar had made his home.

The denizens of the jungle soon accepted him and his strange union with the lion. There were those who loved him and those who hated him. But love or hate, there was none who denied him the respect which was his due. This latter was true, at least, among those who lived in the vicinity. Since he had joined the lion, he had not seen Trajah the elephant, whose pilgrimages took him on long journeys. Nor Chaka and his tribe of great apes, also wanderers. Nor N'Guru the gorilla, whose haunt was the dense forest that covered the distant mountain peak.

THOUGH Ka-Zar had chosen the lion's cave in preference to the tent of DeKraft, he had not forgotten the belongings left by the white man. One day the reflection of his own face in a placid stream reminded him of the glittering mirror. The more he thought of it, the more he wanted it. And though he had not the faintest idea what good it might do him, he determined to visit the camp again and find it.

To reach a decision was to carry it out. He set off at once with his long, loping stride toward the distant spot. And at last, after an uneventful journey, he came to the stream where DeKraft had washed out the pebbles.

Profligate Nature had been at work. A tangle of brush and vines had closed in about the tent. Dampness and mould had rotted its fabric until it sagged, a

shapeless, ugly, gray growth.

Some distance away, in the direction of his old home, Ka-Zar heard the crashing of branches. It told him that Cheka and his tribe of great apes were once more passing through the vicinity.

From inside the tent, too came a sound—the muffled stir of something moving about. Ka-Zar's eyes narrowed; he fingered the knife at his belt, that he had always kept keen and shining. That tent and all that was within it, was rightfully his. And he had no intention of letting anyone else despoil it.

Softly he crept forward, raised the sagging flap.

A huge, hairy ape stood with his back to the entrance. In one hand he clutched the precious mirror and it was evident, from his pose, that he was held fascinated by his own reflection within it.

As low rage possessed Ka-Zar, filling his deep lungs, he roared the mighty challenge of Zar.

Clutching the mirror, the ape whirled. From sullen, red-rimmed eyes he stared back at the strange two-legged creature in the opening of the tent. The roar of the lion, coming from this queer hairless animal, evidently puzzled him. But he showed no fear.

In the guttural language of the jungle, Ka-Zar demanded the mirror.

The ape's shoulders stooped over in a crouch. His broad nostrils flared. "Bardak found it," he answered.

Swiftly Ka-Zar measured his challenger. He did not know that Bardak, though of full growth, was young and the trouble maker of his tribe. But he could see that the ape equalled his own height and that Bardak's mighty chest and long arms were far more powerful than his own.

The realization came to him that here, in this small space, his weapons would do him no good. Out in the open, with the spear or the bow and arrows that his father had taught him to make and use,

he would stand a chance. Caution told him to wait until the advantage was his. But despite his better judgment, Ka-Zar could not find it in his heart to evade the ape's challenge.

Drawing his knife, he repeated his demand for the mirror. And in answer, Bardak thumped upon his broad chest and gave vent to the bellowing war-cry of the apes.

It was too late to back down now. With the shining blade clutched tightly in his fist, Ka-Zar edged forward. Bardak flung the mirror upon the mouldering cot and stretching forth his long arms, came to meet him.

Instinct told Ka-Zar that once in the grasp of those terrible arms, he would be crushed and mangled. Side-stepping the ape's shambling rush, he staked all on a sudden powerful stab at the beast's unprotected side.

But Bardak's clumsiness was deceptive. Even as the sharp blade pricked his side, one hairy hand shot out and closed about Ka-Zar's wrist.

THE ape's fingers were like bands of steel. They tightened, and an agony of fire shot up Ka-Zar's arm. The gleaming blade slipped from his paralyzed hand and thudded to the ground. He braced himself as Bardak pulled him forward.

A momentary wave of awful hopelessness swept over him. Weaponless, in the cruel grip of the big ape, he faced a terrible death.

And then the spirit of his dead father came to his rescue. He recalled the tricks that he had learned on the occasions they had wrestled with each other. Suddenly he let his arm and body go limp. Then, in the instant while Bardak was bewildered by this unexpected lack of resistance, he broke free, grasped Bardak's long left arm in two hands and twisted it to a position between the ape's shoulder blades.

He was behind Bardak now and safe for the moment. And instead of the ape clutching his wrist, it was he who twisted the arm of the ape. With all the strength of his powerful young body he forced Bardak's hand up towards his thick neck.

In his battles with other members of his tribe, Bardak had known only the method of straining an opponent to his broad chest and crushing him there. He could use his teeth, too, but now he could only gnash them in helpless rage. This arm lock baffled him and he did not know how to break it.

Ka-Zar hung grimly on, pressing his advantage. He strained his powerful muscles until his heart and lungs threatened to burst. Slowly but inexorably, the ape's arm went up . . . up . . . up . . .

A liquid fire of agony ran down the length of Bardak's arm. His shoulder flamed with pain and a roar of rage tore from his lips.

Ka-Zar knew then that he had won. Another wrench—and Bardak the troublemaker would be crippled forever.

There was no reason for him to hesitate then. Mercy has no place in the wilderness. A foe vanquished is an enemy—and an enemy is slain. But something deep within Ka-Zar's heart stayed him and hardly understanding why, he rose above the laws of the jungle.

"Ka-Zar is your master," he panted in Bardak's ear.

And with a painful croak Bardak answered: "Ka-Zar is my master."

Releasing his hold, Ka-Zar took a long step backward. "Ka-Zar gives you your life. Go!"

The ape glared at him from red-rimmed eyes. Then nursing his throbbing arm, he shuffled from the tent.

Ka-Zar realized full well that he had spared a life—and gained a bitter enemy. But he knew that Bardak had

no heart for further punishment just then. Dismissing the ape from his mind, he turned his attention to the matter that had brought him there.

First he recovered his knife, thrust it once more into his belt. The mirror followed it. DeKraft's other possessions held no meaning for him. He left them there. Let Bardak come back for them—if he dared.

Then, eager to tell Zar how he had mastered the ape, he set out once more for the cave.

CHAPTER XI

TRAJAH THE ELEPHANT

ZAR heard his tale in silence and then displayed his disapproval of the man-cub's foolish act of pity with a rumbling grunt. From her corner of the cave Sha spat disdainfully. But Ka-Zar only smiled. Such was the glory of his strength that he could afford to be magnanimous. Bardak, dead and the tale of his passing would be forgotten with him. Alive, he was an ever present testimony, to his, Ka-Zar's might.

The days passed into weeks, the weeks into months. Ka-Zar roamed the jungle with Zar at his side. Walah the hippopotamus greeted them as they drank together in the first flush of dawn. Coiled on a hot rock, Sinassa the snake watched them from unblinking eyes as they rested themselves in the heat of mid day. And at eventide, Dikki the jackal slunk on their trail to gorge himself on their kill when they had had their fill.

Nothing transpired to disturb the serene flow of Ka-Zar's days. He made weekly pilgrimages to the little clearing by the lake that had been his home for his first ten years in the jungle. But by now the acute grief he had felt at his father's death had mellowed into a

gentle melancholy. He had learned that it is the one inevitable rule of the jungle that all things must die. However, the realization of that fundamental truth in no way lessened his hate of the fat white man. The vow he had sworn over his father's grave was still in force.

Not that he had the slightest idea of the symbolism behind the gesture—but because his father had taught him to do so—he would gather flowers from the grassy floor of the glade and adorn the twin graves with them. The simple act gave him a strange, inexplicable pleasure.

However, even with the passage of months, Sha never fully accepted him as one of her own. Her attitude towards him was one of surly toleration and she gave him to understand that if it had not been for Zar, her master, she would have none of him. In addition to her instinctive fear and hate of the man cub, her emotions were now tinged with jealousy.

Ka-Zar understood Sha's feminine psychology and was secretly amused by it. But of late, the lioness, as she kept closer and closer to the cave, became more sullen, spiteful and unapproachable.

She became heavy of limb, her movements slow. And every night Zar would bring to her the tenderest quarter of a fresh kill.

It was early one morning at the beginning of the rainy season that Zar suggested to Ka-Zar that they absent themselves from the cave for a day or two.

The man cub understood and was glad. He growled his approval. He had never forgotten his early desire to make friends with Trajah the elephant. Here was an opportunity and he suggested to Zar that they go in search of the great gray beast and his herd.

Zar was familiar with the regular pilgrimages of the elephants. He knew

where Trajah could be found and he readily agreed to lead Ka-Zar in that direction.

Glad to get away from Sha, who had been most surly and unfriendly of late, they set off. Their bellies were full and though several times they caught sight of easy quarry, they pressed steadily on.

They stopped once to drink their fill from a winding stream. Soon the rains would swell it to a rushing torrent. But now its rocky bed made for easier traveling than the dense undergrowth that crowded the jungle. They followed it.

A few minutes later, while still traversing the narrow ravine, they heard a loud crashing ahead of them. As they pulled up short, the trumpeting of a mighty elephant echoed through the air.

Zar snarled a single command. "Flee!"

Dumfounded, Ka-Zar watched the lord of the jungle make a single long leap, then scramble up the rocky side of the ravine. Ka-Zar could not believe his eyes nor his ears. Zar, ruler of the wilderness, and his proud brother—flee from a beast? It was incredible, unbelievable!

FROM the safety of the high, sheer bank Zar urgently repeated his warning. But before Ka-Zar could move, a great gray shape appeared at the head of the ravine.

The elephant was one of Trajah's herd. Though not quite as large or as powerful as the mighty leader, this one was nevertheless an enormous beast. His huge ears waved, fan-like, on either side of his head. His trunk weaved slowly from side to side. A sinister, reddish gleam shone from his little eyes and a strange, musk-like smell wafted down wind to Ka-Zar's nostrils.

Ka-Zar had never seen those gleaming tusks impale a living creature, tear-

ing out its vitals. He had never seen that snaky trunk wind about a victim, then shatter bone and flesh against a boulder or a tree trunk. He had never seen those huge feet trample a beaten enemy until only bloody pulp remained.

But instinct warned him vaguely of some such dire fate. And instantly he gauged the distance between the swaying beast and a towering daboukra tree whose immense bole rose up from the stream bed off to his right.

The elephant's piggish little eyes fastened on the strange two-legged creature in his path. Red flames of hate flared up in their depths. Flinging back his head, he trumpeted a shrill challenge. Then with tusks gleaming, he charged forward.

With incredible speed Ka-Zar dashed for the daboukra. Hand over hand, like Nono the monkey, he climbed swiftly up its smooth bole. He gained the lower branches just in time. The elephant's tusks missed him by scant inches. Hurriedly he climbed upward.

Below him, the elephant squealed his rage. He capered awkwardly for a moment about the trunk of the tree. Then setting his front feet firmly on the rocky ground, he braced his massive forehead against the bole of the daboukra and pushed.

High up in the tree Ka-Zar clung to his perch. The topmost branches quivered, swayed far over. Slowly but surely the elephant increased the pressure.

It seemed impossible that the immense jungle giant in which Ka-Zar had taken refuge, could be so shaken by a living beast. But that great gray shape below him was the most powerful creature that existed. The daboukra quivered along its entire length and when it cracked a series of staccato warnings, Ka-Zar realized that he was not safe.

Flattened until he was scarcely vis-

ible on the opposite bank of the ravine, Zar watched the titanic struggle. Ka-Zar clung to his thrashing perch and glanced swiftly around. There were many towering trees about him, but the distance between him and the nearest was just too great for him to negotiate.

With insane determination, squealing and grunting, the elephant continued his assault. A violent shudder racked the daboukra from topmost branch to root. It swayed far over, poised for a moment at a perilous angle and then with a grinding noise, headed in a great arc for the ground.

Ka-Zar had timed its fall to a fraction of a second. At just the right moment he let go his hold and with the impetus given him by the toppling daboukra, described a long parabola through the air. His outstretched arms caught the branches of the nearest tree and the sudden break in his flight almost tore him from his hold. He crashed against a limb with a force that knocked him breathless, but hung desperately on.

Recovering swiftly, he swung himself upward. Now he was on the outer fringe of the massed jungle and traveling swiftly through the leafy passages, he circled around to a point where he could gain the other bank and rejoin Zar.

THE elephant trumpeted his frustrated rage. Then seeing that his victim had successfully escaped him, he suddenly wheeled and went plunging blindly off down the ravine.

Ka-Zar lay by the lion's side and recovered his breath. His narrow escape from death made him very thoughtful. He considered the matter in silence.

Here, then, was a beast who violated the code of the jungle. Trajah and his tribe did not eat meat, so that it was not for food that the elephant had tried to kill him. Neither was there a feud

between them, an old score of vengeance to be settled. And the only other kill sanctioned by the jungle code—to slay in self defense—was out of the question in this case. The mighty elephant had no fear of this puny two-legged creature.

Why, then, had the great beast been so fiendishly intent upon stamping out his life? Ka-Zar was still pondering the matter when another crashing brought him up to a crouch. Together he and Zar peered over the edge of the bank.

In the same direction from which the other had come, a towering gray form appeared at the head of the ravine. Slowly, majestically it moved down the stream bed and Ka-Zar recognized Trajah himself. In his wake came his herd, crowding down the narrow ravine. Several of the females paused to drink and Trajah waited patiently beside them.

Ka-Zar jumped to his feet. His lungs expanded and he growled a greeting.

The heads of the herd swung up to look at him. Trajah surveyed him with the same majestic calm.

"I am Ka-Zar, brother of Zar," announced Ka-Zar.

Trajah acknowledged the introduction.

"We come in peace," went on Ka-Zar. "How is it, then, that one tried to slay me?"

A distant trumpeting sounded far down the stream. Trajah flapped a lazy ear. "That one was Tupat," he answered. "The madness has come upon him."

It was strange, after Ka-Zar's recent encounter with the enraged beast, how docile these huge gray monsters were. He realized that he had nothing to fear from them. Sliding down the steep bank, he walked boldly up to the great leader.

"Madness?" he repeated. He shook his head. He did not know that in one

respect, his own father had gone mad. He did not know what it meant to lose one's senses.

Zar, though, had encountered mad elephants before. That was why he, the lord of the jungle, had recognized the strange note in Tupat's trumpeting and had sought refuge high up on the bank. Now he came down and stood beside his brother.

And so Ka-Zar learned how occasionally the strange madness descends upon a great gray beast and starts him tearing off into the jungle, uprooting giant trees and slaying all in his path. Sometimes, in his red blindness, he plunges over a cliff and dies. Usually the spell is short and, recovering, he rejoins his herd.

Trajah and his tribe were now following the rampaging Tupat. Slowly, for even they feared a brother when the killing lust was upon him. They would keep well behind him and soon he would quiet down and rejoin them.

Ka-Zar realized as he studied Trajah, that the elephant leader was possessed of a keen brain. And Trajah, in turn, seemed to know that this strange brother of the lion was not the silly, helpless creature that he looked. Zar and Ka-Zar lingered awhile with the herd. And when at last they departed on their homeward journey, Ka-Zar had made another, and valuable, friend.

THEY were both tired and spent when at last they reached the cave. But Zar soon received the great satisfaction of knowing that in his absence he had become the father of two sturdy, clawing sons.

Ka-Zar was equally delighted. In an attempt to see them he peered into the cave and received a blow that sent him spinning backward. He picked himself up and rubbed himself ruefully. Sha's paw had lashed out with incredible speed and it was fortunate indeed that

her claws had been sheathed.

Limping, he rejoined Zar, who had been wiser than he in not venturing too near. And that night they both stretched out before the entrance to the cave, to guard the tawny cubs that had come to bless the royal pair.

CHAPTER XII

BARDAK THE TROUBLEMAKER

THE one kink in the mental psychology of Bardak the great ape was that he remembered the unpleasant things in life, rather than the pleasant ones. And since the ascendancy of Ka-Zar in the jungle, the unpleasant scores he had to settle had increased rapidly.

Bardak was young, headstrong and willful. He was in the first flush of his full strength and the blood was hot in his veins.

With a bitterness that made him pound his great chest, he recalled the short-lived delight that he had experienced by making faces at himself in the circle of bright glass he had found in the camp of the Oman. And with a bitterness even greater, he recalled his battle with Ka-Zar, when the latter had taken the reflecting glass from him.

It was like pouring oil on Bardak's angry temper to realize that Ka-Zar had shown mercy. Though he had been bested in fair fight—though he had been completely at the mercy of the lion-man, Ka-Zar had spared his life.

The humiliation of his defeat ate deep into Bardak's soul. But that was not the worst of it. Ganya, the most desirable of the unattached females in the tribe and the one he courted, mocked him at every opportunity, taunted him that the puny Ka-Zar had bested him in battle.

Bardak would chase her through the

trees, vowing that he would snap her neck like a twig when he caught her. And when Ganya fled to the topmost branches, where his greater weight would not permit him to follow, he would vent his wrath by strutting across the jungle floor and boasting of the dire things he would do when next again he met Ka-Zar.

Wise old Chaka, leader of the tribe, counseled caution. But Bardak would have none of it. In the courting season his masculine ego had been slighted and in the eyes of Ganya he had been made to appear ridiculous.

As far as Bardak could see, there was only one way to restore himself in the eyes of the apes—and especially Ganya. He must produce that wonderful bit of glass he had told them about, boast that he had taken it from Ka-Zar. And to this end he began to scheme in his cunning brain.

For two days he concealed himself high in the tree that overlooked Zar's cave. Carefully he noted the comings and goings of Zar and Ka-Zar. For the simple reason that he never saw the lion-man make faces at himself in the bit of glass, he was sure that he did not carry it on his person. And by the same process of elemental reasoning he arrived at the conclusion that the mirror was in the cave.

The certainty of this simplified Bardak's problem. He could gain possession of the mirror without again running foul of Ka-Zar. Only Sha and her two cubs, who seldom wandered far from the cave, stood between him and the possession of the thing that would restore him to respect in the eyes of Ganya.

And when he had that bit of glass he would tell Chaka what an old, timid, fool he was. Bardak thumped his chest. Some day he would challenge Chaka for leadership of the tribe. But first he had to get that bit of shining glass.

Bardak was blessed with at least one virtue—that of patience. For two days he clung to the branches of the tree that overlooked the cave, without showing himself. And early on the morning of the third day his patience was rewarded.

With the rising sun Zar and Ka-Zar emerged from the mouth of the lair and disappeared silently into the jungle. A few moments later Sha, followed by Zoro and Sulani, her two cubs, left the cave to sun themselves in the hot rays that slanted through the trees.

BARDAK watched them with small red eyes, grimaced. He determined that if Sha strayed away but a scant few feet from the cave, he would enter it and make his search.

And then chance favored his bold plan. An impudent, unwary aingu bounded across the shallow clearing almost directly beneath Sha's nose. If it had not been for her cubs, Sha would have feigned sleep at this show of lese majeste. But it was high time, she decided, that the sons of the mighty Zar had their first lesson in the hunt.

With a snarl, she arched her back and sprang after the fleeing aingu. The rodent dove precipitately into the tangled undergrowth at the far side of the glade. And once the scent was in her nostrils, Sha could not resist the chase. She followed after the aingu, leaving her cubs and the mouth of the cave unguarded.

Bardak saw his opportunity and he took it. Dropping a sheer twenty feet, from limb to limb, he reached the ground before the leaves of the brush had settled back into place after Sha's passing. He ran with long, ungainly strides, propelling himself forward by the knuckles of his hands.

He paused a moment at the mouth of the cave, glanced once swiftly about him, then stooping, crawled through the narrow opening.

Only on rare, ritual occasions were Bardak and his tribe meat eaters. Now the strong blood-tang odor of the cave flared his nostrils wide, made his own blood quicken. He moved forward cautiously, feeling the sides of the tunnel-like passage as he went.

He was stirred by a twinge of fear. If Sha or her mate should return, he would be trapped. For a moment he considered beating a hasty retreat but the thought of Ganya drove him on.

He reached the cave proper a moment later, stood erect and glanced swiftly about him. Bones littered the floor. At one corner of the far side the stones of the floor were worn smooth, marking the spot where Zar and Sha lay down to rest. Opposite this was a rude bed of dried branches and moss, not unlike the couch that Bardak himself slept on.

He crossed to it swiftly and a moment later his sense of smell confirmed what his cunning brain had told him. This was where Ka-Zar slept—this, in all probability, was where the bit of shining glass was hidden.

With unholy enthusiasm at his destructiveness, Bardak attacked the litter with feet and hands. A minute later it lay strewn about the four corners of the cave. From the floor he picked up a long stick of wood that glittered at one end. He examined it curiously, a moment, incautiously touched the shining tip, felt a prick on one finger and saw the red blood ooze from his skin. With a grunt he dropped the spear and continued his search. But to his bitter disappointment, the mirror was not there.

After risking so much he had failed. The thick veins in Bardak's throat swelled with anger. Then a short roar from Sha, muffled by distance and the walls of the cave, reminded him of the danger of his position. He beat a hasty retreat down the short tunnel that led

to the mouth of the cave and emerged into the glade just as Sha broke clear of the jungle wall on the far side. At his feet the lion cubs tumbled over one another.

Sha saw him immediately, screamed and leaped forward. In answer Bardak pulled back his lips and gnashed his teeth together. He had started his spring for the lowest branch of the tree that hung over the cave, when some mad impulse seized him.

If he had failed to retrieve the bit of shining glass, he would not return to the tribe empty-handed. He would bring back with him a greater trophy—a living token of his fearless courage. With one long arm he swept up Zoro, the nearest of the lion cubs, and leaped for the limb. Agilely he swung himself up and Sha's frantic lunge a split second later missed his hindquarters by a matter of inches.

With the clawing cub pressed tight to his chest, Bardak climbed swiftly to the upper branches of the tree. Here, from this safe retreat he snarled down at the lioness beneath him, while Sha wore herself out in impotent lunges at the overhanging branches above her.

The jungle echoed and re-echoed to her snarls of rage. And a moment later, drifting in on the wind came two answering roars—one from Zar, the other from Ka-Zar.

Bardak heard and was afraid. However, he did not relinquish his prize. With Zoro clutched firmly to him he swung off through the trees and from the ground below Sha followed his progress, making the day hideous with her screams.

ZAR and Ka-Zar were some miles from the cave when Sha's first roar of rage silenced the jungle tongues. They sent their answer echoing back, then plunged swiftly through the tangled growth for the glade. A moment

later Sha's cry of rage drifted to them, crowded with overtones of trouble. The mane on Zar's neck ruffed out and a snarl trembled in his throat. Ka-Zar gripped his knife tighter and increased his long stride.

In an undeviating line they made straight for their objective and the lesser creatures of the jungle scurried to make room for their passing. Halfway to the cave, the direction from whence came Sha's call changed. Zar answered her and followed after Ka-Zar as he turned off abruptly to the right.

They cleared the narrow end of the swamp in three strides, forded a swift-running stream and guided by Sha's cries, pressed steadily forward. It was plain to them that she, too, was on the trail and the course they were following was shrewdly calculated to intercept hers. They also knew by the note of baffled rage in her voice that something out of the ordinary had taken place.

A few minutes later her cries became stationary and breaking through a dense tangle of matted lianas, they found her lunging at the lower branches of a tree that towered above her. Her ears lay back flat against her skull and flecks of foam dripped from her bared fangs.

Zar leaped to the side of his mate, nuzzled her. Sha shook him off impatiently, spoke in staccato growls: "Bardak the ape—he has stolen Zoro and taken to the trees."

As one the heads of Zar and Ka-Zar snapped back. From high up in the branches of the surrounding trees Chaka and his tribe glared down at them. Chattering in their midst, holding the clawing lion cub in one hand and pounding his chest with the other, was Bardak.

Zar bellowed in futile rage. "Come down, Bardak! Or you and your tribe will pay for this!"

Bardak's only answer was to hold out the squealing Zoro still further, dan-

gling it over the perilous heights.

Zar addressed Chaka: "The cub. You are the chief of your tribe. The cub—or war to the death between us."

But Chaka was concerned only with keeping the peace among his own people. In matters between the apes, he exercised his authority. The lion cub, however, was not his affair and he told Zar so.

The lord of the jungle trembled from regal mane to lashing tail, in the grip of a terrible rage. He gave vent to a roar that sent smaller animals scurrying to cover for miles around. But the apes in the trees only looked back at him unmoved and Bardak chuckled. For the mighty Zar was helpless in his fury—he could do nothing and they knew it.

Off to their right was the swift-flowing stream that coursed past Zar's cave, further down. Here it ran between high, rocky banks, strewn with great boulders. An immense oulangi tree thrust its head high into the sky above it.

With one arm wrapped around the terrified cub, Bardak made for it. Ka-Zar realized his intention and raced toward the bank. Snarling, Zar and his mate followed, while the other apes watched in stony silence from their perches.

High, high up in the oulangi, Bardak climbed with his prey. Ka-Zar could have followed but he knew that before he could reach the ape, he would be too late. Instead he tried to stop Bardak with a warning.

"Ka-Zar is your master," he called.

THE ape pulled his lips back from his fangs in a hideous grin. "Then let Ka-Zar save his brother," he retorted, indicating the whimpering Zoro.

"Ka-Zar showed you . . ." Ka-Zar stopped. There was no word for 'mercy' in the language of the jungle. Instead, he finished: "This time Bardak will die."

But the ape refused to be cheated of his vengeance. Still farther he climbed up into the giant tree, up, up, until he reached the topmost branches that would not hold his weight. Then slowly he edged out along a swaying limb.

Now Zar and Sha saw what he intended and their roars made the very ground quake. The vengeful ape meant to hurl their cub from the tree, crushing out his life against the rocks below. Already, to them, Zoro's death was inevitable. But they reckoned without their strange blood-brother.

For Ka-Zar had arms. His eyes were riveted on the ape. He saw Bardak hurl the tawny little body downward and judging the arc as the cub hurtled earthward, he leaped out among the boulders.

A breathless silence held them all. Ka-Zar's eye was keen and his arms powerful. He braced his body as Zoro spun toward him. The cub landed in his outstretched arms with such force that he staggered perilously a moment before regaining his balance.

The impact knocked the breath from Zoro's body but he was not injured and a moment later Ka-Zar climbed up the bank and tossed him gently toward his bewildered parents.

With strange, whimpering cries, Sha licked her trembling cub. But up in the tree Bardak, cheated by the miracle, chattered his frustration.

The ape's rage was matched by the black fury in Ka-Zar's heart. Now that the cub was safely out of the way, he could go up after the troublemaker. Whipping out his knife, he placed it between his teeth. Then with a mighty leap he gained the lowest branch of the oulangi and started upward.

Bardak saw him coming and crouched on his limb, grimacing hideously. Fear was in his heart and had there been no witnesses, he might possibly have fled. But now his whole tribe, with Ganya among them, was watching. He could

face death, but not disgrace.

If the odds had been against Ka-Zar during their first encounter in the tent, they were still greater against him now. The mad light of panic flared in the ape's red eyes and made him far more formidable than if he had been cockily confident. And remembering the terrible agony that Ka-Zar had inflicted upon him before, Bardak was doubly cautious now. He had the advantage, too, for Ka-Zar must climb up to meet him.

The fight would be in the tree top. For though Chaka and his tribe were more at home on the ground, twin deaths in the shape of Zar and Sha waited eagerly down there now.

Ka-Zar glanced over his shoulder as he climbed. Chaka and the other apes still sat motionless and he realized that, even as the stealing of the cub had been strictly Bardak's affair, so too, this coming battle did not concern them.

Far overhead wheeled Kru the vulture. His sharp eyes had made out the strange gathering of these big beasts and now he sailed on motionless wings watching Ka-Zar and the ape. There would be a kill and he waited patiently for death to come to one of them.

Ka-Zar's brain told him that he must, somehow, get past his enemy—get above him. He was close to where the ape crouched, now. Circling the huge bole of the tree, he swung himself up on the opposite side.

Bardak's intelligence was dulled by the rage and fear that possessed him as he watched the two-legged creature reach his level. His clawing hands reached out, but at that instant Ka-Zar whipped the knife from between his teeth. The shining blade glinted in the sun.

BARDAK'S experience with the spear he had found in the cave was still fresh in his memory. Here was another

shining thing and it, too, would cut him. Instinctively he drew back and Ka-Zar, taking advantage of the moment, leaped up to a higher branch.

It swayed perilously under his sudden weight. Cautiously, still clutching the knife, he edged out along it over the crouching form of the ape. As he went, the limb cracked along its length in staccato warning.

Gathering his muscles, Ka-Zar prepared himself for the leap. And as the branch gave way, he dropped down full upon the back of his enemy.

Bardak squealed wildly. But before he could recover from his startled amazement, Ka-Zar's left arm slid around under his chin and snapped back his head. Then the hand that held the gleaming blade described a swift arc through the air and the sharp knife buried itself to the hilt at the base of Bardak's throat.

The ape's scream was stilled abruptly. Ka-Zar jerked the knife free and a jet of crimson blood spurted in its wake. He had just time to catch a new hand-hold among the branches as the huge, hairy body collapsed.

There was a series of crashes as Bardak's lifeless body plunged down through the leafy branches of the oulangi. Then, turning over once in mid-air, it landed spread-eagled on the boulders of the bank below. Bardak had met the very fate that he had intended for the helpless cub of Zar.

Kru spiraled slowly downward as Ka-Zar tilted back his head and sent the roar of the jungle lord echoing and re-echoing through the forest. Then sheathing his dripping blade, he dropped swiftly down through the tree.

The kill had been accomplished so swiftly that Chaka and his comrades hardly realized what had happened. Not till Bardak's body struck the rocks, never to move again, did they realize that one of their number had met his

doom at the hands of this strange two-legged creature. By the time Ka-Zar came striding over toward them, they were muttering among themselves.

He halted below them and looked up at Chaka. "I am Ka-Zar, brother of Zar," he declared arrogantly. "Who molests my brothers—dies."

The mutter of the apes grew louder. Several showed their fangs. Then as one, they looked at their leader.

Chaka considered the weak-looking, yet formidable creature who dared to issue this ultimatum. Chaka was powerful, far more powerful than the troublesome Bardak had been. He felt no fear of this strange Ka-Zar.

But he was ruler of his tribe by virtue of wisdom as well as brawn; of cunning as well as courage.

"Bardak was unruly," he temporized.

Again the apes muttered angrily, but Chaka stilled them with a guttural syllable. "Bardak is dead," he told Ka-Zar. "Bardak forgotten. Chaka goes."

The apes knew their leader too well to question his courage. His decision quenched the last smouldering embers of resentment among them. And at his signal they moved off slowly through the trees.

As Ka-Zar stood watching them go, a tawny shape moved silently up behind him. Something moist, then soft fur, brushed lightly against the hand that hung at his side. He looked down to see the amber eyes of Sha glowing up at him. And a great peace came to his heart as he realized that at last her suspicions were gone—that she accepted him.



CHAPTER XIII

TRAJAH COMES FOR HELP

WITH the truce between him and Sha cemented at last into an eternal friendship, a new era of happiness dawned for Ka-Zar. Graciously the lioness permitted him to play with her cubs and he found endless delight in frolicking with them. He spent long hours in the hot sunshine before the cave, while Sha lay in the entrance watching. He cuffed them gently in mock battles, sent them spinning when both leaped upon him at once. He laughed at their absurd imitations of Zar's mighty roar and when the day came that one first flattened on his belly, stalked an imaginary kill and leaped upon it, he reported their progress as proudly as Zar might have done.

But the Fates that ruled the destiny of this lonely wilderness had started something, on that long-ago day when they had sent the crippled airplane spinning down into the clearing. That momentous event had brought a chain of others in its wake. And the addition of this strange man-cub to the jungle folk had a profound effect upon all subsequent happenings.

A month after the death of Bardak, Ka-Zar was awakened one night by the loud trumpeting of an elephant. Zar stirred beside him, growled low. Ka-Zar raised himself to one elbow.

The trumpeting came again, nearer this time, and the man-cub rose. "It is Trajah," he said. "I will go."

He crawled swiftly out of the cave. It was just light enough for him to see the huge form of the elephant leader coming toward him. And as he advanced to meet the gray beast, Nono chattered down at him from a tree.

The elephant came to a halt when they met and began a restless swaying. Ka-Zar did not need to ask the reason

for the unexpected summons. He sensed that there was trouble afoot in the jungle. But he was not prepared for the startling nature of that trouble.

"Your brothers," said Trajah. "They have taken Tuta, a female of my herd."

"My brothers?" Ka-Zar thought of Zar and Sha, lying back there in the cave with the sleeping cubs. For a moment he was sorely puzzled, then suddenly he understood. Men! Trajah meant men—the Oman!

Eagerly he tried to learn more. But the language of the jungle is limited. Some things, however, he could understand without being told. Apparently Trajah had come for his help, thinking that he might be more able to cope with his own kind. But why the Oman had taken Tuta, and why Tuta was unable to get away from them, he could not figure out. After his own experience with the mad Tupat, he knew the titanic strength of the elephant.

"Where are these brothers of mine?" he asked.

"Two days journey from the cave," answered Trajah.

"Wait," said Ka-Zar. "I will go with you."

Crawling back into the cave, he gathered up his weapons. Zar questioned him with a single low growl that ended on a rising inflection.

"I go with Trajah," he answered. "On a long journey." Then leaving the cave again, he rejoined the waiting elephant.

Nono dropped down onto his shoulder and he tried to brush him off. The monkey, however, only clung the tighter. With a shrug, Ka-Zar allowed him to remain.

With Trajah in the lead, the party traveled south, following the edge of the great lake—on whose shores John Rand had so unexpectedly landed. They reached its southerly end and there their progress was halted by a wide river that

was the outlet of the lake. Ka-Zar was a powerful swimmer but as he gauged the distance he must cross and the rush of the sweeping current, he hesitated.

Trajah saw his doubt. Winding his long trunk about Ka-Zar's body, he raised the man-cub, swung him through the air and deposited him high on his own broad back. Nono wrapped both arms around Ka-Zar's neck and uttered shrill squeaks, compounded of delight and fear.

And thus, Ka-Zar's boyish wish—to ride on the great elephant—was gratified at last. He clung to his precarious perch as Trajah strode straight into the river. When the waters swirled up about his shoulders, the elephant struck out with a mighty stroke.

The current was swift and when at last Trajah labored up the opposite bank, they were a mile farther downstream. When they plunged into the jungle once more, Nono again took to the trees. But Ka-Zar laid very flat on his friend's broad back, lest the branch of a tree should brush him off in their passing.

TOWARDS sunset of the second day, they paused on the brow of a high hill. From his point of vantage on the top of the elephant's back, a panorama lay before Ka-Zar that held him breathless.

For him, memory began vaguely with the days when he and his parents had lived in the lean-to. All before that had been long since blotted from his mind. Except for the breaks made by small clearings, by lake and stream, he knew nothing but dense jungle. And quite naturally, if he thought about it at all, he thought that the great forest was endless.

Now, for the first time, he saw where it ended. And beyond its outer fringes stretched a great, grassy plain. It extended far to the distant horizon, flat as

the surface of the lake. A hot wind came in puffs across it, rippling the tall grass in undulating waves of gray-green and mauve. Ka-Zar's eyes, keen as those of Pindar the eagle, made out enormous herds of strange beasts moving slowly across the level expanse.

While he was marveling at the wondrous sight, Trajah raised his head and trumpeted loudly. And from somewhere in the distance, came an answering call.

"Tuta," Trajah said.

Ka-Zar knew, then, that they were near the end of their journey. And though, as yet, he had no idea what they would do when they got there, he cautioned silence.

"You, too," he called to Nono. "Let us have no more of your silly chatter."

Nono grimaced back at him, but thenceforth maintained a dutiful silence. Trajah moved down the side of the hill into the thinning fringe of the forest. Several times Ka-Zar caught further glimpses of strange beasts that roamed the plain. Once a band of zebras, bizarre in their black and white stripes, galloped past. Another time he stared in amazement at a big, ungainly creature with a tremendously long neck—the giraffe. And later, he saw a familiar tawny shape slink through the tall grass.

Ka-Zar first saw the rising thread of smoke wafted from the camp fire. Then he heard the faint sounds of the men, busy with their preparations for the evening meal. He called a low note into Trajah's ear and when the elephant halted, slid agilely to the ground.

"Wait here," he commanded.

Leaping up into the nearest tree; he swung from bough to bough, with Nono following his progress on higher branches. Swiftly and silently they gained the outermost fringes of the forest.

The plain was a vast oven of blister-

ing heat by day and so these men had pitched their tents in the shade of a great baobab. Now, high in this tree, Ka-Zar and Nono looked down on the encampment directly beneath them.

Several black men were busy before the fire. Three tents, similar to the one DeKraft had used, opened toward the plain. Ka-Zar passed them over with a glance, then stared in fascination at the array of cumbersome objects behind them.

He had never seen a cage before. In a way, these strange shelters reminded him of the lean-to. But he could see no opening in them and in each one was a jungle beast.

Nono squeaked when he saw that one held about eight frightened members of his long-tailed tribe. Ka-Zar stilled him with a warning growl. There was a brother of N'Jaga, stirring restlessly in his confined quarters. Beside him, Quog the wild pig squealed in rage. A big, long-legged stork stood with his head on his breast in profound melancholy. And beyond them Tuta stood swaying in the long grass, her head swung in the direction from which Trajah had last called her and her gaze yearning.

KA-ZAR tossed back his long hair and his brows knitted in a frown. She was not confined in one of the strange shelters. Why did she stay there, then?

"Go back to Trajah," he whispered to Nono. "Tell him to call again."

The monkey sped nimbly off and Ka-Zar turned again to watch Tuta intently. The hush that comes with the sunset had fallen over plain and forest. A moment later it was shattered by the trumpeting of the elephant—strident, commanding, pleading.

Tuta's head came up. With an answering cry, she lunged forward, only to pull up with a sudden jerk. And

then, as she thrashed against the bonds that held her, Ka-Zar saw them. The swaying grasses revealed the stout ropes that bound each of her feet to stakes set firmly into the ground. All Tuta's strength could not break them.

The opening flap of the center tent billowed outward and a white man stepped into Ka-Zar's view. He was not DeKraft, for he was tall and slender and his hair was the color of N'Jaga's glistening coat: He snatched up a long rifle that leaned against the front of the tent and turned to peer into the dense jungle whence Trajah's call had come.

With his eyes watchful, but a little half smile playing at the corners of his lips, he addressed the unseen elephant. Up in the tree, Ka-Zar heard his voice.

"Back again, eh?" he said in clear English. "Sorry, old boy. But she can't join you. There's a new home waiting for her—far away—in a nice zoo."

It was a long time since Ka-Zar had heard his own tongue. He understood everything but the last word of the white man's speech. His voice had been pleasant but though its tone seemed to convey no threat, Ka-Zar scowled. The jungle was Tuta's home. And somehow, some way, he would see that she returned safely to Trajah and the rest of the herd.

In a different language the white man flung a command at the blacks who had paused to stare. Then, as they busied themselves at their work again, he strolled over to inspect Tuta's hobbles. She plunged and squealed again at his approach. Keeping at a safe distance, he circled about her. Then apparently satisfied that she was firmly held captive, he strode back to his tent and disappeared.

Ka-Zar studied the camp intently, then left.

CHAPTER XIV

JUNGLE MYSTERY

SILENT as the deepening shadows, Ka-Zar made his way back to the waiting elephant. He did not know man-made rope but it resembled the tough lianas that hung in festoons from the lower branches of the jungle trees. Now he understood why Trajah had been unable to free this hapless member of his tribe and had come to him for aid. And he knew that his gleaming knife would be able to accomplish what all the elephant's mighty strength could not do.

"Tuta will be free," he told Trajah.

The elephant tossed his trunk to show his pleasure. He took an eager step forward in the direction of the camp.

Ka-Zar barred his path on straddled legs. "Not now. We must wait until night comes. Then—" he drew his knife from his belt, tested its gleaming blade on his finger—"then I will steal into the camp."

Reluctantly Trajah agreed.

"We will not hurt the Oman," continued Ka-Zar. "I think they meant Tuta no harm. There is another matter, too. Other jungle brothers are held captive in the camp. We must help them, also."

Nono jumped up and down, happy to think that his forlorn brothers would also be freed. Tugging at Ka-Zar's arm, he begged to be allowed to help.

They waited, while the dusk deepened. Since the Oman had fire-sticks, they knew it would be fatal to attempt the rescue of the jungle beasts until the two-legged creatures had retired for the night. Not until the camp was quiet would they venture forth.

Ka-Zar warned the elephant that he must be content to wait where he was. If he moved in the direction of the

camp, the noise of his coming would surely arouse the men.

With the rising of the moon, Ka-Zar and Nono returned to their vantage point in the big baobab. The wind had changed and their scent was carried to the captives in the cages. The leopard's head whipped up. The monkeys began a nervous jabbering, Ka-Zar risked a low, guttural call, commanding them to silence.

A black, scrubbing the cooking pot with handfuls of grass, heard him. But never dreaming that such a sound could have issued from a human throat, he continued with his work.

Ka-Zar's life in the jungle had given him a patience that matched his courage. Several times the men passed directly beneath him but not the faintest sound told them that something was watching them from the baobab.

The moon rose higher—an enormous orange ball that crept up, slowly from the horizon. It turned gradually to silver and its rays bathed the vast plain with a mystic, bluish light. The camp fire was piled high for the night and finally the last black crawled into a tent and vanished.

Ka-Zar had learned to be more than cautious. Ten minutes later his low note of warning floated softly from the tree. Then, with Nono, he swung down through the leafy branches and dropped lightly to the ground. First he circled each tent, his footfalls making no noise in the tall grass. He located each man within by the sound of his breathing and from the regularity of that breathing knew that they were all asleep.

Not until then did he rejoin Nono, who was crouching on top of the cage that held his brothers. For breathless minutes he explored the unfamiliar contrivance, seeking some way to open it. At last he managed to unfasten small ropes that held a sliding panel on one end of the cage.

Threatening the silly creatures with dire punishment, indeed, if they made a sound, he drew the panel carefully upward. The excited monkeys jammed at the opening, squeezed through and with Nono joyfully leaping ahead of them, scampered for the trees.

THE big stork came next. Evidently it had been a prisoner for quite some time, for when Ka-Zar opened the door of his pen, he stepped out and looked about him in bewilderment. At last he realized that he was free. With a flap of his long wings he soared into the air and headed out over the plain.

Swiftly and silently Ka-Zar went on with his task. Quog made a straight rush into the darkened forest. The leopard lingered long enough to growl an acknowledgment to his strange rescuer, cast a baleful eye at the motionless tents and then vanished like a blacker shadow into the darkness of the night.

Tuta stirred restlessly at Ka-Zar's approach. He had to risk another warning to quiet her. Then with the sharp blade of his knife he sawed at each rope in turn until she was free. Fearful lest she should arouse the camp before they were well away, he led her quite some distance along the edge of the grassy plain. Not until he was sure that they were out of earshot of the sleeping men, did he plunge once more into the jungle and take her by a circuitous route back to where Trajah patiently awaited them.

STEVE HARDY, big game hunter and wild animal collector, turned over on his cot. He woke suddenly from a fitful sleep and wondered what it was that had awakened him. Hitching himself up onto one elbow, he listened. No strange sound disturbed the stillness.

Still he felt uneasy. And finally it dawned upon him that it was the very

silence that bothered him. Never had the camp been so still. Of the specimens that he had collected, there were several who complained about their captivity—all through the nights.

Pushing aside the mosquito netting that draped his bed, he thrust his feet into his boots. He picked up the flashlight that always lay within easy reach and got his rifle on the way out of the tent.

He did not need to click on the button of the flash. The moon bathed the camp with brilliant light, throwing the tents and the animal cages into sharp relief. And Steve Hardy was astounded to learn that the big leopard, his most magnificent specimen, was no longer behind bars.

Uneasily he glanced about him and to his dismay he quickly learned that the others had vanished likewise, while he had slept. He shouted and a moment later he was joined by his retinue of Ankwalla blacks, all instantly wide awake.

Quickly he pointed to the empty cages, hurling questions at them in their native tongue. But they were as baffled as he and as they thought about it, more and more terrified. Huddling at his heels, they followed him from cage to cage.

Hardy was beside himself with rage. The arduous labor of months, undone in a single night! His Ankwalla boys would not have done this—there would have been no reason for it. Surely no inquisitive monkey could have pried into camp and accidentally freed all his animals. The sliding doors were too heavy for a monkey to have lifted. The bull elephant that had called to the cow from the jungle—an elephant does not unfasten ropes . . . elephant . . . elephant . . .

Suddenly Hardy looked up. His elephant, too, was gone!

The natives jabbered excitedly as

they raced after him to the spot where Tuta had been tethered. Hardy dropped to one knee, picked up the rope still fastened to one of the stakes. And the bright moonlight revealed the startling fact that it had not been torn, but neatly cut in two!

Slowly he rose to his feet. An oath died still-born on his lips. Common sense told him that a man, armed with a knife had cut that strand of rope. But as far as he knew, no man—white or black—was within a thousand miles of his lonely outpost.

Why, in God's name, he asked himself, would any man release all his animals and vanish again? A madman? Madness would not have protected him against the ferocity of that huge leopard. He gazed about him, half-expecting to see a mangled lifeless corpse. But only alternate patches of shadow and brilliant moonlight marked the grass around the camp.

From deep in the jungle came the trumpet call of two elephants. And then, not far from his lonely camp, another challenging sound echoed out of the wilderness. It was the deep-throated, mighty bellow of a lion. It was, though Hardy did not know it, the triumphant call of Ka-Zar, brother of Zar, lord of the jungle.

While Hardy meditated, baffled and angry, on the mysterious evil that had visited him, his Ankwalla boys held a whispered conclave. Then headed by his gun boy, they marched up to where he stood.

THEIR leader explained that for some reason, the all-powerful gods of the jungle were angry. The spiriting away of the animals had been a warning to them all. Unless Hardy and the rest departed at once, they, too, would vanish as mysteriously and as silently as the beasts.

In vain Hardy argued with them. He

had come many thousands of miles and had spent a considerable amount of money organizing this expedition. They must patiently begin their labors all over again. But he could not explain the startling events of the night and they would not listen to him. What dire fate awaited them when the jungle gods should spirit them away, they could only guess at darkly. But depart the Ankwallas would, and Steve Hardy, perforce, must go with them.

CHAPTER XV

MARK OF THE LEOPARD

THE news of Ka-Zar's exploit in freeing the jungle beasts from the traps of the Oman, traveled swiftly through the forest. As one who had witnessed the miracle, Nono the monkey bragged loudly to Sinassa the snake. And in turn, Sinassa passed on the tale to Wal-lah the hippopotamus, with fresh embellishments. With each telling of the tale, the fame and prowess of the man-cub grew, until all the jungle accepted him, at last, as a friend.

That is, all but one. N'Jaga, whose spotted flank still bore the scar of John Rand's bullet and who limped slightly as a result of it, could not forget his hate. If anything, it was fanned to new heights as he scornfully listened to the jungle creatures sing the praise of Ka-Zar.

Next to Zar the lion, N'Jaga had been feared and respected in the jungle. And now, with a bitter intensity he resented the intrusion of the man-cub who had usurped his place in the jungle scale. He felt that he had lost caste, that the only way to regain it was to prove his mastery over Ka-Zar.

And to this end, N'Jaga sulked many long hours in the forest, devising ways and means to dispose of his enemy. He

was too wise to seek an open conflict with the man-cub. Though he scorned the puny strength of Ka-Zar in contrast to the might of his own supple limbs, he yet feared the two-legged creature for his tricks and for the cruel weapons he wielded with his hands.

N'Jaga early decided that the basis of his campaign should be cunning. And after much deliberation, he hit upon a plan that offered every prospect of success.

A hundred times, from a discreet distance, he had stalked Ka-Zar along the jungle trails. He knew that invariably every day the man-cub went down to the lake, to swim there a long time and to gossip with Wal-lah. Before entering the water he would strip himself of the skin that covered him. But more important than this was the fact that he would leave his weapons on the shore of the lake.

N'Jaga ran a dripping tongue over his jowls as he matured his plans.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day that Ka-Zar swung swiftly through the trees to the shore of the lake. He dropped lightly to the narrow strip of sand that formed the beach and shouted a greeting to Jacaru who floated motionless in the shallows like a log.

Ka-Zar was hot and tired from a long hunt with Zar and he tingled at the prospect of plunging his naked body in the cool waters of the lake. He stripped swiftly and as the cunning N'Jaga had known he would, carelessly dropped his knife to the sands.

With a long springy stride he leaped out to the end of a log that projected far into the lake, poised there a moment, then dove cleanly into the water. He swam under the surface for a long distance, came up puffing and snorting by the side of Wal-lah far out in the water.

For a few moments they talked, then

with a long easy stroke, Ka-Zar struck out for the distant shore of the lake, which was still bathed in dappled sunshine. He reached the far side at last. His favorite spot was a deep pool close in to shore. A giant baobab tree, smitten by a bolt during some ancient storm, hung far over it and made an excellent perch for diving.

But first he had to pay his respects to the nimble Nyassa. Vainly he tried to capture the fish, but with consummate ease she eluded his darting fingers.

TIRING of the sport at last, he rose to the surface, rolled on his back, relaxed completely and floated. For a few minutes he studied the outlines of the clouds drifting high in the heaven and imagined that he could see in their ever-shifting shapes, the faces of the different jungle beasts.

Then a furtive movement along the trunk of the baobab, a few feet above his head, caught his eye. Instead of seeing the fancied faces of the jungle beasts in the clouds—Ka-Zar saw a very real one, in the flesh.

It was N'Jaga on the trunk above him, poised for a spring. The spotted haunches of the leopard were tensed back, his rump was raised and the talon-like claws of his forepaws were arched.

From malignant green eyes he glared down at Ka-Zar.

Fascinated, hypnotized, Ka-Zar stared back. He knew that he had been trapped; knew that N'Jaga had cunningly awaited this opportunity before striking.

Then silently, without a sound, the leopard sprang. All the pent-up hate of his dark heart propelled his body forward. But even while he was in mid-air, Ka-Zar rolled his body over.

Instead of gouging out his eyes and slashing his face to ribbons, N'Jaga's claws sank deep into the man-cub's back.

Ka-Zar was conscious of streaks of liquid fire tearing across his spine. Pain, greater than any he had ever known before, consumed his body. Like a stone he sank beneath the weight of the beast whose talons still clung to the flesh of his back. Desperately, by a sheer effort of will he fought off the numbing fog that settled on his brain. Every sense of self-preservation rose to his defense.

But unarmed, he was helpless against the superior weight and strength of the leopard. Hard as his hands were, they were no match for the fangs and claws of N'Jaga.

And then Ka-Zar's brain—the thing that set him apart and above the beasts—came to his rescue. It was futile, he knew, a losing, hopeless battle, to try to fight N'Jaga on such unequal terms. To come to the surface meant death. His only salvation lay in sinking ever deeper to the bottom of the lake.

Jungle cats have an aversion to water and it was a measure of N'Jaga's hate that he had plunged into the lake to destroy his enemy.

Ka-Zar knew this and prepared to act. The leopard was still clinging to his back and from all indications was content to stay there. But the man-cub thought differently. With a sudden movement he shot up both his arms and encircled N'Jaga's head that loomed up above his own. His fingers locked together in an unbreakable grip and exerting his every ounce of strength he applied pressure to the cat's neck until N'Jaga's head was pressed close to his own.

Together they sank towards the bottom until Ka-Zar thought that his lungs must burst; until N'Jaga could stand the pressure no longer. A fear, that in fulfilling his vengeance, he, too, must die, stirred in his brain. His claws ripped from Ka-Zar's back. Wildly he struggled to break the hold on his neck—to reach the surface—and air.

Then the strangling hold around his throat relaxed. True, he desired the death of Ka-Zar greatly but he desired his own life more. He pushed down on the water with his large padded paws and propelled himself towards the surface. He knew that the man-cub was sorely wounded and he doubted whether he would ever rise to the surface again.

He was content. N'Jaga had won.

The leopard was right—in at least one respect. He had indeed been the victor in this first conflict with the man-cub. And when he reached the shore of the lake he screamed his triumph to the listening ears of the jungle.

BUT so preoccupied was he in proclaiming his might, that he failed entirely to see the torn and mangled thing rose slowly to the surface of the lake and clutch weakly at a low-hanging limb of the baobab.

If N'Jaga had not under-estimated the stamina and endurance of his enemy, he might have tarried there by the shore and finished his work at his leisure. For Ka-Zar was too spent, too weak from loss of blood to offer further resistance.

But the leopard's heart was full of vain glory and without a backward glance at the lake, he stalked off into the forest, proclaiming his kill.

It was a long time before Ka-Zar gathered sufficient strength to work his way to shore. A still longer time before he skirted the lake to retrieve his loin cloth and knife. Fever consumed his body and his limbs were like water beneath him. His brain was numb but the lesson he had learned from his encounter with N'Jaga gave him a grim, if bitter, satisfaction.

It was this—never again, no matter what the circumstances, would he be caught without his knife. And the bare knife was clutched in his hand when he stumbled at last into the cave.

For days Ka-Zar lay helpless and sick in the cave. For days Zar and Sha stood guard over him, tending his wounds the only way they could—by licking them.

At long last the fever left his body and a skeleton of his former self, he struggled to his feet. In celebration of the event Zar brought fresh-killed antelope quarter to the cave, and fruits fresh gathered by Nono the monkey.

Ka-Zar ate, drank and slept again. And from that time on his recovery was rapid. But ever after he bore the mark of N'Jaga upon his back.

CHAPTER XVI

RETURN OF THE OMAN

WHEN Paul DeKraft had fled from the jungle clearing, with the sound of Zar's roar echoing in his ears, he had taken with him two secrets. First, the grim details of the death of the mad jungle hermit; second, the location of the richest emerald beds it had ever been his good fortune to stumble across.

The first dark secret slipped readily from his mind. It was not the first time that he had killed nor would it be his last. But the second was forever with him, a shining promise of a vast fortune to be looted by him alone.

The lure of those emeralds, to be picked up by handfuls from the bed of that jungle stream, spurred him on to herculean efforts. He worked, robbed and plotted murder to accumulate a stake to take him once more to the heart of the Belgian Congo.

And now, after five long years, at the end of another rainy season he was leading a large party into the heart of the wilderness over which Zar and Ka-Zar had ruled for so long.

The expedition consisted of a score

of blacks and one white man—Ed Kivlin. He was a renegade like DeKraft and if he was not as villainous as the Hollander, it was only because DeKraft had lived some few years more than he and had served a longer apprenticeship to the devil.

DeKraft had not taken him along out of the open generosity of his heart. He had been motivated by far baser and more practical reasons. It was simply that Kivlin had a few hundred dollars—and he needed them. For food, shovels, guns and ammunition, but mostly ammunition.

And all the time there was a little idea in the back of his head that perchance a little accident would befall his benefactor. No matter how it came about—before the fang and claw of some jungle beast or from a bullet from his own gun—he was convinced and determined that Eddie Kivlin would not come out of the jungle with him.

Once he had made his alliance with Kivlin and the dollars, DeKraft started to assemble his party. But to his disgust and impatience, he found that as soon as he mentioned the Congo as his destination, the native blacks shunned him as if he carried the plague.

Strange tales, weird, wonderful and unholy, had drifted down from the Congo. They had first been brought back to civilization by a great white hunter and his camp followers. The tales had to do with a jungle god, the protector of all wild things, who was incensed at man for molesting the beasts of the forest.

Hadn't this god, who spoke with the voice of the lion, liberated a season's catch of the great white hunter? Hadn't he slashed the ropes that held the mighty elephant; broken open the cage that held a huge leopard?

The tale grew with the telling and DeKraft was forced to deceit and trickery to assemble the natives he needed.

It was not until the party was a month's march from the nearest white outpost or native village that he told the blacks their real destination.

Then unarmed, without food, it was too late for them to turn back. DeKraft laughed long and raucously over what he considered the good joke he had played on them.

The natives listened to him in silence and with hate in their hearts. Sullenly they struggled on with the party but with each mile they penetrated deeper into the Congo, the greater became their superstitious fears.

It was at the end of a long, hot day when DeKraft triumphantly led his party at last into the small glade he had quitted so precipitately five years before.

HE looked about him with greedy eyes. Nothing had changed, except that the vines and brush had crept in from the forest and made a dense growth that covered the clearing. The last, tattered remains of his tent still remained where he had abandoned it. The stream still rushed by, innocently tumbling over a fortune in uncut emeralds.

He pounded Kivlin enthusiastically on the back, threw his arm wide.

"So help me, Eddie," he said, "here we are! A fortune—there in the stream—ready to be picked up by the hand-fuls."

Kivlin grinned wolfishly, took a long pull from a bottle of square-face gin and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "We didn't get here any too soon for me," he answered. "And as far as a fortune goes, I could use one."

"Plenty for both of us—plenty for both," said DeKraft heartily. Then he turned hurriedly away to hide the crafty gleam in his eyes.

He issued a string of terse orders to his bearers. Under the lash of his

tongue and the persuasive power of his heavy fist, they hurried about the business of making camp. With long knives the undergrowth was cleared away. Tents were pitched; the supplies and ammunition stored away. A half hour after their arrival a thin plume of smoke went up from their fire to announce their coming to the jungle beasts.

It is significant that both DeKraft and Kivlin slept little and lightly that night and in both their hands were heavy automatics. True, the blacks were sullen and surly, but it was not for fear of them that they crept into their respective cots thus armed.

The thoughts of each were the same. A fortune! Why share it? Each in his own way planned towards the same end.

However, despite their mutual distrust and treachery, the first night passed uneventfully.

KA-ZAR was a two-days-march distant from the cave when DeKraft pitched his camp in the clearing. He was on one of his frequent pilgrimages to the feeding grounds of Trajah and he was all unaware that his old enemy, Fat-Face, had returned to his domain; all unaware of the trouble that was brewing for him in the jungle he had so long ruled with Zar.

His first intimation that some serious mischief was afoot came three days later. It was night and he was listening to Trajah's account of distant lands that the elephant had seen on his long migrations.

Trajah was in the midst of some strange and fascinating tales when abruptly, from far off, came the stentorian roar of a lion. Ka-Zar's head snapped up and his eyes narrowed. The elephant's large ears flapped slowly at right angles to his head.

"Zar calls," said Ka-Zar.

"The lion calls to his brother," echoed Trajah gravely.

A vague, disturbing premonition stirred in Ka-Zar's brain. Swiftly he threw back his head, expanded his leather lungs and a moment later the forest shook as he sent the lion's call echoing back to Zar.

Three times more Ka-Zar repeated his roar, then without a sound the massive form of Zar materialized out of the brush. With Trajah lumbering at his side, Ka-Zar stepped eagerly forward to meet him.

He rumbled a warm greeting deep in his throat, then before Zar could answer it, asked what had brought his brother on his trail.

In a few swift grunts and snarls Zar told him. Many two-legged creatures like himself—many Oman—white and black—had come to the glade by the stream that babbled over many stones. They had brought fire sticks with them. There was much death. There was trouble brewing in the forest of Ka-Zar and it would be wise for Ka-Zar, brother of Zar, to return.

The white man's adage that the elephant never forgets, is based on sound fact. He never forgives an injury and he never forgets a friend. To his distant dying day, Trajah would carry always with him the memory of that time when Ka-Zar had rescued Tuta from her strange captivity.

Now trouble had come again to the jungle and there was no question whether the elephant would stand by his friends. Knowing Ka-Zar's delight in riding upon his lofty back, Trajah waited for no more. His trunk snaked out, wound about Ka-Zar's body and lifted him easily up to his favorite perch. Then with Zar gliding swiftly along in the lead, they began their long journey back to the cave.

Ka-Zar was troubled with vague apprehensions of what might already have occurred during his absence. And when at last they reached their home,

he found that his fears were well founded.

In the trees around the cave mouth squatted Chaka and his apes, waiting for his return. He slid down from the elephant's back and walked forward as the big leader swung down from his perch and came shambling over to meet him.

Chaka's manner conveyed neither open hostility nor full-hearted friendship. He grunted a greeting, then cocked his head on one side and surveyed Ka-Zar gravely from head to foot. It was plain to see that he nursed suspicions, but was reserving a decision.

"Your two-legged brothers have returned," he announced. "And death comes with them."

Ka-Zar brushed back a lock of his long hair and scowled. "They are not my brothers," he growled. "I belong to the tribe of Zar."

Chaka thrust forward a pendulous lower lip, scratched thoughtfully at one ear. "You are a two-legged creature," he said slowly.

KA-ZAR realized that words were futile. His actions must speak for him. "Death speaks from their fire-sticks?" he asked.

"Two moons ago," answered Chaka, "Dakar saw something that glittered and went to examine it. The Oman cried out and one of them pointed at Dakar with a fire-stick. It spoke with the voice of thunder and Dakar died." A mournful sound rose from the apes squatting in the trees, corroborating his words. "Yesterday," Chaka continued, "Babba, a female, wandered foolishly too near their home. A fire-stick spoke swiftly, many times, and Babba died from many wounds."

At this recital of their loss, the apes in the trees set up an angry muttering. One called to Chaka. "Let us go and kill these Oman."

Others took up the cry of vengeance. Chaka hesitated, looked to Ka-Zar.

The brother of Zar shook his head. "Do not try," he warned. "The fire-stick strikes like the lightning and before you could kill, many more would join Dakar and Babba in the Great Sleep." His eyes narrowed and he fingered the knife at his belt. "I have driven these Oman from the jungle before and I will do it again. Keep well away from their home while I go see what can be done."

Zar and Trajah would willingly have accompanied him. But he told them that he desired to go alone and leaving his friends and the muttering apes to await his return, he set out at once for the camp.

His ears quickly told him that the men had made their home where De-Kraft's old tent still mouldered. When he approached the spot, Nono saw him from his vantage point in the upper branches of a tall tree. The little monkey, fearful and yet overcome by an insatiable curiosity, could not tear himself away from the scene of so much activity.

Ka-Zar, too, took to the trees. He reached one that gave him a clear view of the camp in the clearing and then, flattened along a stout limb and so screened by the dense foliage that he was invisible from below, he watched.

The fact that the men had come to this very spot brought back once more all the terrible memory of that day when his father had been killed. And with it revived the deep seated desire to wreak vengeance upon the fat, black-bearded man.

He saw many black men busy before the tents. One took a steaming kettle from sticks that held it suspended above the fire, carried it a little apart and set it down to cool. A white man suddenly appeared from the fringe of the forest, on the opposite side of the

clearing. Ka-Zar stiffened.

A long fire-stick hung loosely from the crook of the man's arm. His head was covered by something that looked like a bloated, white mushroom. He took it off, revealing a thatch of hair, the color of the flaming sunset. Then he looked towards one of the tents and called out: "Hey, Dutch!"

In answer, a bulky form pushed out from the tent. Ka-Zar saw a swarthy face, an untidy black beard, a bulging belly. A low growl rumbled deep in his throat and the hair at the base of his skull prickled. His usual caution was drowned by the deep, undying hatred that suddenly flamed up within him. There stood the slayer of his father—and he had to fight the impulse to snatch his knife, scream the kill of the lion and drop down from the tree to confront his old enemy.

For a long moment the battle raged within him, then wisdom conquered. Every nerve in his body taut, he lay on the branch and glared his hatred from slitted, tawny eyes.

THE two men stood for a moment, conversing in low tones. A clumsy, bristly gray creature wandered out from the forest into the clearing. Quag, brother of Quog the wild pig, paid no heed to his strange new surroundings. He was headed for the stream to slake his thirst and on his way, he nosed for the berries and succulent roots that comprised his diet.

The cooling kettle was directly in his path. Carelessly he nudged it with his snout. It tipped over, spilling its savoury contents on the ground.

One of the blacks shouted. DeKraft looked up, saw at a glance what had happened. With a torrent of oaths he snatched the rifle from Kivlin's arm, whipped it to his shoulder and blazed at the clumsy pig who had spoiled his dinner.

There was a stab of flame, an echoing roar. The hapless Quag squealed once in shrill agony, then pitched forward, never to move again.

His needless death, the wanton cruelty with which DeKraft had taken a jungle life, added fuel to the flame of Ka-Zar's wrath. Again he had to battle the impulse to challenge the vicious Fat-Face, who had shattered the peace of the forest.

With a low growl, telling Nono to follow, he edged lithely back along the limb, turned and headed towards the cave. When he was well out of ear-shot from the camp, he sent the monkey off on a strange errand.

"Go! Find all the big beasts of the jungle and tell them to go to Zar's cave. I will wait for them there. Make haste, silly one."

While Nono obediently set off, he continued on his way to rejoin his friends and the troubled apes. They greeted him with expectant gaze but he merely went to sit on a great boulder and there silently pondered his problem.

CHAPTER XVII

OUTCAST

KA-ZAR had chosen a swift courier. In ones, in twos, in large groups, the animals came to learn the reason for his summons. Keeping well to their own kind, they gathered in the vicinity of the lion's lair, waiting for Ka-Zar to speak.

It was well into the afternoon when the last arrived. N'Jaga, with several of his spotted tribe, stalked out of the forest and warily joined the gathering.

Ka-Zar stood up on the rock and surveyed the motley collection of beasts that inhabited his wilderness domain. Chaka and his great apes still squatted

on the lower branches of the trees. Nono and his long-tailed friends scurried about above them. Zar and Sha stood side by side, a regal pair, before the door of their home. Trajah swayed restlessly in his place. Quog and his grunting people moved about, championing their tusks nervously.

N'Jaga and the leopards crouched to one side, their gleaming eyes shifting swiftly at every movement. Even Sinassa the great snake had come. He stretched, coiled about a strong limb, and watched the gathering from unblinking, beady little eyes. And far overhead Kru the vulture, thinking that this meeting of the bigger jungle animals would provide him with such a feast as he had never seen, wheeled around on motionless wings.

All eyes turned to focus on the figure of Ka-Zar, dominating and arrogant, astride the rock. A hush fell upon them and flinging back his regal head, he shattered the silence with the mighty roar of the lion. Respectfully they listened as it echoed and re-echoed through the leafy fastness. Only N'Jaga's tail twitched and his lips pulled back a trifle from his teeth.

His face dark with passion, Ka-Zar launched into his speech.

"Jungle brothers," he began, "Ka-Zar, brother of Zar the mighty, called you here. Trouble has come to our home, great trouble. Oman have come again to molest us—to hurt us—to kill us."

He flung his arms out in a sweeping gesture. "The Oman are evil. Unlike us, they slay for no reason. Chaka will tell you that two of his tribe died before their terrible fire-sticks. Other beasts have perished, also. This very afternoon I saw Quag, brother of Quog, die because he had foolishly blundered into their clearing."

He turned his head to stare for a long moment in the direction of the distant

camp, his jaw set at a grim angle and his eyes boding no good to the marauders who had come to violate the sanctity of his wilderness.

He turned again to his strange audience. "I, Ka-Zar, brother of Zar, shall drive them out. But now I give you all warning. Nothing can stand before the fire sticks of the Oman and live. Let all the animals keep well away from the clearing. Let no more lives be needlessly taken. When the time comes, I will summon you and together we will have our vengeance."

He folded his arms and looked about the gathering of beasts. At once they set up a subdued muttering, growling, chattering and grunting among themselves.

N'Jaga rose to his feet, fell into a crouch. He snarled. "Ka-Zar is no lion," he growled. "Ka-Zar is of the Oman. N'Jaga does not trust him."

The beasts listened to his words, then fell to a more excited chattering. Ka-Zar knew that N'Jaga had voiced the suspicion that already lurked in the minds of Chaka and his apes. He could see that Chaka was swayed by N'Jaga's words. Glancing about the assemblage, he saw quickly that the seeds of mistrust had fallen upon fertile ground. The other beasts wavered, but already N'Jaga had gained an advantage.

The cunning leopard knew, and pressed it. "We have claws and fangs," he spat. "Why do we permit ourselves to be slain by these weak, hairless creatures—the Oman? Let us kill this one and then go to slay the others."

NONO and his friends chattered shrilly up in the branches. Chaka dropped to the ground and with his tribe at his heels, lumbered forward. His threatening attitude decided the rest. Ranging themselves around N'Jaga and his snarling cousins, they flung their defiance at the man-cub.

Ka-Zar knew that his life hung in the balance. His knife, his bow and arrows, his deadly spear could not help him now. Alone, in single combat with any denizen of the jungle, they would give him a fighting chance. But let all these beasts charge him at once and he was doomed.

Yet arrogantly, boldly, he stepped down from the rock and strode up to confront them. Without a moment's hesitation, Zar and Sha ranged up at his side and Zar's deep-throated challenge rumbled from his mighty throat. Then Trajah the elephant moved majestically forward and took up a position on his other side. With a blasting trumpet, he defied any creature to approach them.

The hatred for this two-legged creature that N'Jaga had nursed so long in his breast, urged him to spring. But the sight of Ka-Zar's powerful allies stayed him. For a long moment he crouched, tail lashing, and the terrible slaughter for which Kru waited on motionless wings, hung on his decision. A pregnant silence held them all.

Then suddenly N'Jaga spat, wheeled around and quickly disappeared into the jungle.

The other beasts had worked themselves up to a pitch of emotion that robbed them of all independent thought. N'Jaga's flight set them an example. And with squeals, grunts, growls of frustrated rage, they scattered and were swallowed up by the forest. Only Nono and the monkeys remained, to hurl gibes after the departing beasts from the safety of their branches high in the trees.

Ka-Zar was left alone with his friends and with the bitter realization that he was held an outcast—a traitor—by his own people. Slowly he turned and walked soberly back to the cave. Flinging himself down before the entrance, he returned again to his problem, now

doubly important and doubly difficult.

He could count only on the lions, on Trajah and the monkeys for any assistance. All the other beasts, even if they did not dare to attack him, would wait in judgment. To regain his supremacy over them and to bring peace once more to his land, he must settle the matter of DeKraft once and for all.

The task would not be an easy one, he knew. Against the white man's weapons he was powerless. And though he lay for a long time, his head pillowed in the crook of his arm, inspiration would not come.

At length he rose. The sun was descending the downward curve of its arc. The shadows of the trees grew longer. Trajah was resting from his long journey. Sha had returned to her cubs and Zar was off on the spoor of a kill. Nono's cousins had dispersed, but the little monkey came and climbed up to his favorite place on Ka-Zar's broad shoulder.

On the long hope that another visit to DeKraft's camp might bring him the inspiration he so sorely needed, Ka-Zar set off in that direction again. And soon, from the big tree, he and Nono were once more looking down upon the activities of the men.

Most of the blacks were still busy at their labors in the stream. Three hovered about the fire, getting ready the evening meal. The two white men—Fat-Face and the owner of the burnished copper hair—were seated at the far side of the clearing, watching the natives work and conversing in low tones.

One of the blacks at the stream walked over toward them, bearing a pan that held several pebbles. Both white men reached for it together, exchanged a veiled glance—then the red-haired one allowed DeKraft to take it. Together they bent their heads over the pan as the native returned to his work.

KA-ZAR could hear their voices, but he could not make out their words. Gliding like a shadow down the tree, he circled about the clearing and then stole softly towards where they were sitting. Not a leaf stirred at his passing; not a twig crackled under his feet. A scant few yards behind them, so flat against the bole of a tree that he seemed to become part of it, he listened. Their conversation was carried on in the language of his dead father and he had no difficulty following their words.

"Emeralds," DeKraft's voice came floating back to him. "A bloody fortune. And these crazy niggers damn near kept us from getting them."

The other joined him in a laugh. "What do you suppose," he asked, "was behind their yarn about an angry jungle god? Something must have put the wind up them, once."

DeKraft snorted. "Bah! You ain't seen no jungle god yet, have you? And what if you did? I never saw a god go up against a high-powered rifle. Hah, hah!" He slapper his knee and roared. "In the city or in the jungle, I never yet seen anything that a bullet wouldn't finish."

"You said it," agreed the red-headed one. "Well, if no jungle god shows up, these niggers will soon forget they were afraid." He rose, stretched. "Come on, Dutch. Laballa's got chow ready."

DeKraft climbed to his feet and they strolled over towards the fire.

Ka-Zar relaxed a trifle and his eyes were very thoughtful. The conversation of the men had been very slangy and several of the words were unfamiliar to him. City, for instance. And god. Niggers, he gathered, meant the blacks.

So the blacks were afraid of something, eh? And because of that fear, they had almost prevented Fat-Face and the other from coming into the jungle. Perhaps, then, they might be able to make the white ones *leave* the

jungle. That is, if their fear became great enough.

A little half-smile twitched the corners of Ka-Zar's lips. He would see what he could do about that little matter.

Patiently he watched and waited for his opportunity. Laballa tended to the wants of the white leaders. The natives at the stream ceased their labors and gathered about their own food kettles, a respectful distance away.

Laballa fed the fire from a diminishing heap of brush. DeKraft called out a guttural command and in response, one of the blacks left off eating. He and Laballa picked up their spears and long knives and headed into the jungle.

The sun was setting and already mauve shadows darkened the floor of the forest. Ka-Zar knew that the two blacks had been sent for wood and it was obvious that they did not relish the prospect.

Instantly he took to the trees and swinging agilely from branch to branch, moved off to follow them. Nono leaped agilely before him and soon they came to where the natives had stopped. One slashed at low boughs and dry, dead brush, anxious to finish their task. The other stood, spear clutched in one hand and long knife in the other, and peered into the gloomy forest about them.

Neither looked up into the trees that towered high above them, but if they had, they would have seen nothing. In the dim half-light, the naked bronzed form of Ka-Zar had melted into one with the shadowy leaves and branches.

Ka-Zar waited until a moment when only the dull thud of the knife sounded in the stillness. Then with all the might that he could summon, he bellowed forth the deep bass roar of the lion.

FOR a moment the cry echoed through the still air and below him the two natives stood immobile as ebony statues,

literally paralyzed with fear. Then suddenly the invisible bonds that held them, snapped. Shrieking in terror, they raced pell mell for the camp.

Fear lent wings to their feet and though Ka-Zar swung swiftly in their wake, by the time he reached his vantage point they had already poured out their breathless story.

The two white men were on their feet. There was a black scowl on DeKraft's swarthy face. The other natives huddled about their terror-stricken companions, their hands clapped to their mouths.

Unfortunately, most of the ensuing hubbub of conversation was carried on in the tongue of the blacks, which Ka-Zar did not understand. But the gestures of the men made a lot of it clear to him.

DeKraft stretched forth his arm and pointed imperiously toward the forest from whence the pair had so suddenly returned. A volley of commands crackled from his lips and Ka-Zar knew that he was ordering them to return for the wood.

But the two natives shook their heads and did not budge. Their eyes rolled, their arms waved, they chattered back at him.

DeKraft's face turned slowly to a choleric purple. Forgetting himself in his rage, he bellowed at them in English.

"Sure, I know damn well there's lions around here. But don't try to tell *me* about one being way up in the top of a tree. Why—you cowardly, lying . . ."

He stepped forward, his fist lashed out with the lightning speed of N'Jaga's spring. There was a dull smack as it struck the jaw of Laballa and sent him toppling over backward into the arms of his companions.

Snatching a gun from his hip, DeKraft faced the blacks, moving its muzzle in a slow, fan-like arc. Muttering,

they fell back. But though he again pointed imperiously at the jungle, backing up the order with a significant gesture of the gun, not one of the natives stirred.

Ka-Zar, well satisfied with his work, left DeKraft still trying with threats and curses to drive out the fear that was in the hearts of his men. He, himself, had had no rest since Zar had come to find him. Now, confident that a few hours sleep would revive both his tired body and his weary mind, he headed back toward the cave.

CHAPTER XVIII

FLOWERS ON A GRAVE

DAWN found him standing over the graves of his parents. He communed a moment with their spirits in silence and deep in his heart, renewed his vow that he would wreak vengeance on his father's slayer. Then, fortified for whatever the day might bring, he started again for the camp of the white men.

He was still some distance from it, when a crashing noise off to his left pulled him up short in mid-stride. He cocked his head to one side and listened. Most animals make little noise in their travels through the jungle. This was not the sound made by Chaka and his apes, nor Trajah, nor that of Quog and his herd passing through the brush. Only one other creature would move so clumsily—a man.

With a prayer in his heart that it might be his hated enemy, Fat-Face, Ka-Zar swung up into the trees and headed swiftly toward the noise. He could not know that the Fates still turned their faces from him; that it was not Fat-Face but Kivlin, grown yet more greedy because of his good fortune who had ventured along the course

of the stream in search of more emeralds.

He could not know either, that Zar, anxious and eager to aid him, had also set out for the camp. The lion's keen nostrils had caught the scent of the hated Oman and disobeying his brother's orders he lay in wait for the foolish two-legged creature who blundered toward him.

Kivlin was not jungle-wise. Not intending to share his find, if he made one, he had left the camp without telling DeKraft. And so it was that instead of carrying a rifle, he was armed only with the heavy caliber automatic thrust in the holster at his belt. Zar, crouching behind a clump of brush at the side of the stream, saw him appear—but saw no fire-stick.

Kivlin bent over, picked up a pebble, turned it over in his fingers and then threw it away in disgust. He straightened up—and was instantly petrified with terror.

Directly in his path loomed an enormous tawny shape. To Kivlin's startled eyes, Zar appeared as huge as Trajah. The lion's shaggy mane was ruffed out into a black fringe. His fangs were bared from glistening teeth. His slitted eyes gleamed and the tuft at the tip of his tail switched angrily.

Kivlin tried to scream, but could make no sound. His numbed brain urged him to run, to bolt for his life. But his legs would not move.

A low, terrifying growl rumbled from Zar's throat. He crouched and his rippling muscles tensed for the spring. And Kivlin, coming to life in that desperate moment, flashed for his gun.

It came up in his clenched right fist, glinting ominously in the sun, and its barrel pointed full at the snarling lion. But in the split second before his finger squeezed the trigger, something thudded lightly to the ground behind him.

The sharp blade of a knife bit into the back of his neck and a warning voice hissed in his ear: "Kill the lion—and you die, also!"

Never was a man in more terrible predicament. Never had anyone such a horrible choice. Never was double jeopardy made yet more awful by such mystery.

Kivlin's nerves could stand no more. And when the voice at his ear changed suddenly to an animal growl, he wilted. His face turned ghastly and clammy beads of perspiration broke out over his body. He felt that he was going mad.

In a daze, he heard the lion growl back, then reluctantly move off to one side and watch whatever was behind the haft of that knife. Kivlin soon learned what that was. A long arm snaked around under his chin, closed like a vise about his neck. A bronzed hand shot out, wrenched the automatic from his grasp and sent it spinning into the brush.

KIVLIN'S reeling senses told him that he was in the grip of a man and almost mechanically, he struggled frantically to free himself. Despite all his strength, he might have been a two-year-old. For the arms that held him were massive, with muscles like bands of flexible steel.

Kivlin was hardly conscious that the lion remained where he was. A sudden violent wrench spun him around, but one hand stayed at the nape of his neck, holding him powerless. And for the first time, seeing his captor, he realized why his struggles had been so futile.

He was staring at a tremendous, bronze giant, naked save for the skin of an animal wound about his loins. A mass of black hair whipped back from the giant's head and his amber eyes held his own with a piercing intensity that transfixed him like the point of a spear.

Kivlin found his voice at last. "Who—who are you?" he croaked.

"I am Ka-Zar," answered the bronze giant, in English that had a strange, guttural tone. "Ka-Zar, brother of Zar, the lion." He pointed to the huge beast, watching them.

Kivlin shook his head as though to awaken himself from some evil nightmare. "What are you going to do with me?"

Ka-Zar fingered his gleaming knife. "I should," he answered, "help Zar finish what he had begun."

Kivlin's face turned yet more ashen. Into his eyes came the blank look of utter despair.

Ka-Zar scowled. "But, no. Your death would avail me nothing. I will give you one more chance for your miserable life." He pointed towards the camp whence Kivlin had come. "Go back. Tell Fat-Face I warn him. Leave the jungle, you and your black brothers, at once. Unless you do, you shall all die."

He shook Kivlin once and the hapless man thought that his neck had broken. Then suddenly he released his hold and stepped back.

Zar growled a mighty protest when he realized that Ka-Zar had again shown mercy to an enemy. The sound was all that Kivlin needed to set his legs in motion. Casting fearful eyes back over his shoulder, he raced madly back the way he had come. His last glance showed him Zar and Ka-Zar, standing side by side, watching his flight. Then a bend in the stream cut them off abruptly from his view and as though the devil were at his heels, he sprinted on towards the camp.

IT was high noon. The tropical sun beat down on the little clearing that sheltered DeKraft's camp with a fierce intentness. But despite the heat, DeKraft was forcing his natives. From

the bank of the stream he towered over them, a heavy bull whip in his hand. When one faltered, the stinging bite of the lash and a savage curse would drive him on again.

To DeKraft, any life but his own was cheap. Especially those of the blacks. With a fortune to be panned out of the river he could see no sense in delaying for petty, humanitarian scruples. Even as he lashed his blacks with the whip, he, himself was driven on by greed.

The horde of emeralds was increasing. He mused regretfully that he had cut Kivlin into the venture. He had been a fool. The find had been his in the first place and he was rightfully entitled to the profits.

He fingered the automatic holstered at his hip and smiled knowingly to himself. He had lots of time. They were a thousand miles from the nearest white man and the white man's law. What happened in that jungle wildness, no one would ever know.

The sound of running footsteps across the clearing snapped his head erect. It was his guilty conscience and his own evil thoughts that made him half pull the automatic from his belt. He whirled. Kivlin was plunging across the glade towards him as if pursued by every jungle demon the blacks had ever believed in.

DeKraft's eyes were quick to note the absence of the gun at Kivlin's belt and he slipped his own gun back into its holster.

Panting, wild-eyed and ashen of face Kivlin pulled up before him.

"What's eating you?" growled DeKraft. "You look as if you've seen a ghost."

Kivlin swallowed at his agitated Adam's apple and with frightened eyes looked swiftly around the clearing. "So help me," he said, "I have."

DeKraft spat disgustedly. "Either

the heat's got you or you're drunk. Go back to your tent and sleep it off."

Kivlin shook his head. "I haven't had a drink all morning." He swallowed again, wet his lips. "I could use one now, though. I tell you I saw him. Him and the biggest lion God ever made."

"Saw who?" demanded DeKraft sharply.

Kivlin looked at him from wide scared eyes. "So help me, I don't know. A big tall savage—a white man from the looks of him and he spoke English. Naked as the day he was born."

DeK's eyes narrowed and he leaped forward. With a gnarled fist he grabbed his partner by the slack of his coat and lifted him half off his feet. "You're mad or drunk, damn you! There's no white man here. I found these emeralds and they're mine. No man can take them away from me."

Realizing that something out of the ordinary had taken place, the blacks quit their work and listened attentively. Though they could not follow the swift interchange of words between the two white men, they understood enough to sharpen their fears and apprehensions.

Kivlin struggled helplessly in DeKraft's grasp. "I tell you I saw him," he whined. "Took my gun away from me, he did. Talked to that bloody beast of a lion and the lion understood. It's got me, I tell you. It ain't natural!"

A vague, disturbing theory began to form in DeKraft's brain. Then he noted that the blacks had ceased work and were whispering furtively to one another. How much of the conversation they had heard and understood, he did not know. But whatever it was, it was too much. This crazy story of Kivlin's if it got about, would be enough to blow his camp to hell.

indiscriminately for a moment and the muttering natives protestingly resumed their labors. With a last warning of the evil that would befall them if they stopped work again, DeKraft returned to Kivlin.

"You've started something with your fool talk," he said savagely. "Let's get out of here." With a violent shove he propelled Kivlin forward and they made for their tent.

There in the comparative seclusion of the shelter, Kivlin told his tale, finishing with the warning that Ka-Zar had given him.

De Kraft sat for a long time in silence when the story was done. In the space of a moment his brain bridged five long years of time to another day in the jungle and to another clearing no more than three miles removed from the one he was then in. There had been a burning lean-to—a dying man on the ground with two bullets in his chest—and a cub of a kid standing against the point of a native spear.

DeKraft remembered the details of that scene clearly. He had been on the point of murdering the kid when the lion had charged. He had fired, missed and fled with the roar of the lion in his ears. Was it possible that the kid hadn't been killed? Was it possible that he had formed some strange, unbelievable pact with the lion?

DeKraft's camp stool crashed to the ground as he rose swiftly. By God! He would find out. He examined his automatic carefully; he picked up a rifle and examined that with equal thoroughness.

"Where you going?" asked Kivlin.

"You stay here," answered DeKraft as he started for the flap of the tent. "And keep your mouth shut. I'm going to lay your jungle god low."

WITH an oath he sprang down to the edge of the stream, brandishing his whip. He played it about him

PREPARED for any emergency, DeKraft made his way cautiously through the jungle and came at last to

the clearing that had been occupied by the mad hermit he had murdered five years before. Though nothing untoward had happened during his short trek, his nerves were shaky and on edge as he stood at the fringe of the encroaching forest and surveyed the small glade.

He was not bothered by the ghosts of the dead past. What worried him more were the possibilities of the immediate present and future.

Cautiously he looked about. The clearing had not changed. The charred remnants of the lean-to, overgrown with jungle grass, still stood in the center of the glade. There was not one sign of life or occupancy about the place and his spirits rose.

Kivlin was mad, he mused. The heat had gotten him, probably.

Then with rifle ready, he stepped forward to make a closer inspection of his surroundings. He had taken but two cautious strides when he stopped abruptly. For there at his very feet were two low mounds of earth and stone. They were unmistakably graves.

It was not this, so much, that startled DeKraft out of his newfound assurance. It was the fact that both graves were covered with flowers—flowers that were fresh—flowers that had been picked no more than a few hours before!

DeKraft retreated hurriedly back to the protecting shelter of the encircling trees. And he was a very thoughtful and troubled man as he made his way cautiously back to his camp.

CHAPTER XIX

GREED AND DEATH

ALL throughout that day, concealed in the tall branches of the trees that hemmed in the clearing, Ka-Zar kept a watchful eye on DeKraft's camp. He had been a witness

to the scene between Kivlin and the Hollander by the stream; had seen DeKraft leave the clearing a few moments later, armed with a long, shining fire-stick.

For a moment he had been tempted to follow him, but decided to remain behind and watch the clearing instead. It was obvious to him that the black men were ill at ease, apprehensive about something. Ka-Zar sensed their hate for Fat-Face and felt that it was only their fear of the white man's gun and whip that kept them at their work.

For the first time an alien sentiment stirred at his heart. Though he did not know it, it was pity.

But he dismissed the feeling with a shrug. He had troubles of his own—and serious ones. With each hour that Fat-Face and his men stayed in the jungle, his own position became more difficult. Fanned by the evil tongue of N'Jaga, old fears, hates and enmities were being stirred up against him. True, he knew that Zar and Trajah would stand beside him no matter what happened, but he had serious doubts of the outcome if the jungle denizens openly revolted against him.

He was suspected and though he was embittered to think that the animals believed he would betray them, he could understand the justice of their attitude. After all, these invading two-legged creatures who had come, bringing destruction with them, were his blood brothers.

Ka-Zar smiled bitterly at that. His blood brothers! And one of them—Fat-Face—had killed his father!

No! Even though they both walked erect on two legs, there was no kinship between him and the white man. For hadn't he, Ka-Zar, sworn a mighty oath over the grave of his father—that Fat-Face should die at his hands.

Ka-Zar was proud. There was nothing but scorn in his heart for DeKraft.

Even though his enemy went forever armed with the fire-stick, he felt no fear of him. It would have been the simplest thing in the world for him to have killed DeKraft—if that would have been an end of things.

But Ka-Zar knew that it would not be. There was the other white man and the blacks. He could not kill them all. And so long as they stayed in the forest with their fire-sticks, no jungle beast was safe.

Analyzing his problem, he arrived at three conclusions. First, by some means he had to capture the Oman's weapons; next, he had to make them leave the land over which Zar had ruled for so long. And lastly, when the first two objectives had been accomplished, he would kill the fat-faced one.

From his tree he saw DeKraft return, speak animatedly with Kivlin for a few minutes, then make a long oration to the black men.

The work of the camp proceeded throughout the day. Evening came, the fires were built and the evening meal prepared and eaten.

Then as the shadows fell-KaZar saw DeKraft enter one of the tents and emerge a moment later carrying four of the fire-sticks. He spoke again for a long time to his blacks, then passed out the weapons to the four most sturdy ones.

Watching from narrowed eyes, high in his tree, Ka-Zar saw the four natives thus armed begin a slow pacing, one on either side of the camp. He had seen Sha pace like that before the mouth of the cave which sheltered her cubs, when danger was near. And he knew that the four natives were on guard.

Against what? Himself, probably. He smiled at the futility of it. Let the four blacks pace themselves weary. He was not interested in them. He was interested in the tent from which Fat-Face had emerged with the four fire-

sticks. For he reasoned, and rightly, if the strange shelter had held four of the Oman's weapons it would probably hold more.

NOT a sound, not one false cry of alarm disturbed the quiet serenity of that night. The four natives paced steadily the lengths of their beats and in his tent DeKraft dreamed of untold wealth in an untroubled sleep.

He was up early with the rising sun. Rolling out of his cot he stepped to the door of his tent and glanced out. The sight of the four guards still tramping stolidly back and forth brought a grin to his thick lips.

"Jungle god!" he snorted with vast disgust. "By God, I'll fix him with a dose of lead and I'll fix those blacks at the first sign of monkey-business. It's the kid, all right, grown up. Show him a couple of guns and he stays away. Smart lad."

DeKraft threw himself into his clothes, splashed a handful of water into his face but did a far more thorough job of washing his gullet from the bottle of gin.

Well pleased with himself and with the night's strategy, he swaggered out of the tent. The clearing was flooded with golden light by now and there was a general stir of activity through the camp.

Feeling that there was no longer any need for the guards, DeKraft took the rifles from them and started with the guns for the tent that housed his supplies. He pushed through the flap, then stopped in speechless amazement. For a moment he could not believe the evidence of his eyes. Again he swept the interior of the tent. But there was no mistake about it. His stock of rifles had vanished and along with them his ammunition.

DeKraft was stunned and speechless for a moment. His first thought was

that the blacks had stolen the weapons—either as a protection against the jungle gods they feared, or what was worse—for a contemplated uprising.

Then he shook his head. He had instilled the fear of death into them too long, for that. The natives would not have dared to violate the tent.

Kivlin? No. Kivlin feared him as much as the blacks did.

There was only one other answer. The brat. DeKraft cursed bitterly though impotently for a few minutes. Then a cunning idea occurred to him. The incident of the stolen guns was the excuse he had been waiting for.

He stepped out of the tent and his loud bellow echoed across the clearing. In his hand he still clutched one of the rifles he had taken from the guards. The blacks looked up from their work and trembled in fear. A moment later, his eyes still puffy with sleep, Kivlin stumbled out of his tent, clutching an automatic in his hand. He raced across the clearing to where DeKraft still stood by the looted tent.

"What's the matter? What happened?" he asked breathlessly.

DeKraft eyed him from cunning, pig-like eyes; his hairy hands worked at his sides.

"That's a nice question from you—your little rat!" he answered.

The concentrated venom in his voice was like a slap in Kivlin's face. He stepped back and half raised the automatic in his hand in a defensive movement.

"What's eating you?" he growled. "What's happened? Why are you calling me a rat?"

"Smart guy, eh?" sneered DeKraft, playing his role to perfection. "Playing dumb, eh? Yeah, dumb like a fox!"

"You're nuts," growled Kivlin. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, no? Then take a look in the tent and see for yourself."

PUZZLED, Kivlin holstered his automatic, looked suspiciously at DeKraft, then stepped past him and entered the tent. DeKraft followed hard on his heels.

"The guns—the ammunition—they're gone!" exclaimed Kivlin, a moment later.

DeKraft laughed. "You're telling me? Of course they're gone and you're the rat that took them. It's a double-cross but you can't get away with it, Kivlin."

For a long moment the two men stood toe to toe, glaring into each other's eyes. Kivlin suspected treachery but it never dawned on him that it had been Ka-Zar who had rifled the tent the preceding night, and who had buried forever their precious guns and bullets in the bottomless quicksands of the swamp.

"You lie in your teeth," he said at last. "If there's any double-cross, you're behind it. You've been planning it all along. I knew. I've seen it in your eyes. . . ."

And then Kivlin saw something else in DeKraft's pig eyes—something that put the fear of God in his heart. He took a long step back, snatched at his automatic.

But before he could whip it out of its holster, DeKraft had jerked up the barrel of the rifle and prodded it deep into his navel.

Kivlin's heart turned sick at what he saw in the Hollander's eyes. Twin pulses pounded in his throat and his mouth was suddenly hot and dry.

"Don't, Dutch—for God's sake, don't," he pleaded frantically. "You can have the emeralds—all of them—honest—all of them—don't—*don't*. . . ."

The final word was blasted from his mouth by a reverberating explosion. DeKraft *had* shot and the muzzle of the rifle had been tight against Kivlin's ribs.

Kivlin swayed drunkenly on his feet

for a moment, then went down slowly, joint by joint, as if he didn't want to die. DeKraft watched him from cold, implacable eyes, then when his erstwhile partner was prone on the ground he kicked at his ribs with a heavy boot.

"You poor fool," he said contemptuously. "You never had a chance. I never intended you to have one."

With the satisfaction of an honest man who has seen a job well done, he left the tent.

CHAPTER XX

NONO, THE WISE ONE

CONCEALED in his tree, Ka-Zar had seen DeKraft's agitation on discovering his looted tent. He had heard him bellow in rage, seen the other white man run over to him and then the two had disappeared into the tent. A few minutes later the shot had crashed out and only Fat-Face had emerged.

Ka-Zar knew then what had happened and he was filled with a fierce joy. The red-headed one had not taken his warning—and he had died. And it was just as well that it had been at the hands of the evil, Fat-Face.

Later that day, Ka-Zar saw DeKraft drive the muttering blacks in the digging of a shallow hole. The body of the red-headed one was pitched uncereemoniously into it and a few handfuls of earth shoveled in on him.

Throughout the brutal performance DeKraft had to lash his natives with tongue and whip. Momentarily they were becoming more surly, trembling on the borderline of revolt. They had been tricked in the first place and now they were convinced that some evil spirit hovered ominously over the camp.

Ka-Zar saw all these things and smiled to himself. One white man had

already been disposed of. It would take little more of his manipulations to scatter the blacks in terror and send them fleeing through the jungle for the land from whence they had come. And then alone with Fat-Face, he would settle his score.

With the intention of returning again to the camp when the shades of night had fallen, Ka-Zar swung off swiftly through the trees in the direction of the cave.

Along the way he passed over N'Jaga. The leopard stopped, threw up his head and spat disdainfully. Ka-Zar had not forgotten the defeat he had suffered at N'Jaga's hands when he had been caught unaware in the lake, nor the trouble the leopard was stirring up against him. He fingered the haft of his knife.

For a moment he was tempted to descend from the tree and once and for all settle the feud that had burned between him and the leopard, ever since he could remember. But after a moment's consideration he changed his mind. Tempting as the opportunity was, he had to forego it. For if by any chance N'Jaga succeeded in killing him, there would be no one to drive the Oman from the jungle.

N'Jaga saw his hesitation and attributed it to fear. He snarled up a taunting challenge.

"Later, N'Jaga," called down Ka-Zar. "And sharpen your claws against the day we meet again."

N'Jaga snarled once more in answer and Ka-Zar swung off through the trees.

He found Zar and Trajah close to the cave and told them how he had stolen the fire-sticks and the little pieces of stone that weighed so much in the palm of the hand. He had disposed of them all in the swamp. He recounted, too, how the red-headed one had died; and then elaborated on his plans for the night.

Zar and Trajah heard him out patiently, expressed their pleasure at the good news he brought. Then the lion spoke from his store of wisdom.

"Beware of N'Jaga and treachery. The jungle beasts are restless today."

Ka-Zar stood up to the full of his majestic height. "Ka-Zar is the brother of Zar," he said simply. "He knows no fear."

Then he walked over to a fresh kill that Sha had dragged in a few minutes before, cut off a generous portion of the animal's flank, squatted on his haunches and ate.

HE slept that day until the long shadows began to creep into the mouth of the cave. Then he rose, went to the stream to drink his fill, but did not eat. He preferred to have a lean belly for the night's work.

Into his belt he slipped his keenest knife and thus armed, he emerged from the cave again. He growled a few words to Zar, who was pacing restlessly before the lair, trumpeted a low farewell to Trajah and with a mighty leap swung himself up into the nearest tree. With a long, gliding swing from limb to limb he proceeded leisurely towards the camp of the Oman.

He had traveled but a short distance, however, when from an obscure branch above him Nono dropped down, landed on his shoulder and threw spidery arms around his neck.

Ka-Zar stopped and gently cuffed the monkey. "Not tonight, silly one. Go back. Tonight Ka-Zar goes into the camp of the Oman to see what mischief he can do."

Nono chattered, scolded, pleaded and begged to accompany him, but Ka-Zar was firm. Still scolding, his long tail drooping mournfully, the monkey watched the brother of the lion swing swiftly off through the trees.

HIGH in a tree, unseen, unheard, Ka-Zar watched the activities at DeKraft's camp come to an end. One by one the fires were banked for the night and in little huddled groups the blacks crept off to their shelters. As on the previous night, the four guards with their fire-sticks paced nervously the length of their posts.

The moon was setting behind the rim of the jungle when DeKraft emerged from his tent. He made a last tour of inspection around the clearing, barked a few words at the natives on guard, then returned to his tent.

Watching, Ka-Zar saw the interior of the shelter light up. For a few minutes the grotesque shadow of Fat-Face, as he moved about, was silhouetted against the walls of the tent. Then the light was snuffed out and silence reigned over the clearing, save for the muffled tread of the four men on guard.

With the patience of the great cats, Ka-Zar kept to the high branches of his tree, never moving. Only his eyes were alert as he took in every detail of the camp. He knew that the blacks were nervous and apprehensive and would be aroused at the slightest noise. He knew that Fat-Face slept with a fire-stick within easy reach.

Let them be deceived by the quiet; let them fall into deep, untroubled slumber. Then he would act.

The bats had ceased their blind wheeling about when at last he stirred. Silent as Sinassa, agile as Nono, he dropped swiftly from limb to limb to the ground. He withdrew the keen-bladed knife from his belt and crouching low, moved forward silently. His objective was the tent he had looted the night before. If he found more fire-sticks there, he would dispose of them as he had the others. If not, there was other work for him to do.

Moving like a blacker shadow in the shadowy night, he skirted the clearing

and made his way swiftly to the rear of the supply tent. He paused here a moment, disturbed by a vague sense of danger. He threw up his head, sniffed the air and listened. The muffled tread of the black guards came to him with uninterrupted regularity. There was no other alien sound to break the alive stillness of the night.

It was through his nose that he scented danger. He sniffed the air again. The peculiar odor of the Oman was strong in his nostrils. Then he shrugged. It was only natural that it should be so, for wasn't he even then standing by one of the shelters in which the Oman had lived?

Grasping the haft of his knife tighter, he knelt down, lifted up the bottom of the tent and silently slipped inside.

He was still on his hand and knees, just in the act of rising, when suddenly a dazzling beam of light flashed in his eyes and blinded him.

Ka-Zar had never seen a flash-light before, had not the slightest conception of their construction or their use. The phenomena of this strange light startled and baffled him. Some magic of the Oman, no doubt, like that of their fire-sticks.

He straightened up slowly, tense, wary, every nerve and muscle on edge. The beam of light rose with him, still centered full in his eyes. It was impossible to see into it or beyond it. For a moment he stood there irresolute, undecided whether to charge blindly forward or to retreat. Then, with startling abruptness his decision was made for him. The light dropped from his eyes to his throat. And when his vision focused again a moment later, he saw his old enemy, Fat-Face, standing no more than three feet in front of him. In one hand he held a small tube from which the stream of light shot out—in the other a short fire-stick that was pointed directly at his heart.

Ka-Zar realized that he had fallen into a trap. And he realized, also, that Fat-Face intended to kill him, even as he would have done if the situation had been reversed.

NO thought of begging for his life entered his head. He was too proud for that and he knew that it would avail him naught. For Fat-Face was as ruthlessly cruel as N'Jaga. From past observation he knew the terrible killing power of the short fire-stick but there was no avoiding it. Coolly he calculated his chances against it. Even if he must die he would try to take Fat-Face with him on the Long Sleep.

Then for the first time DeKraft spoke. "Caught, eh, like any dummy in a trap. The old man's brat grown up! So you're the jungle god who's been scaring hell out of my blacks. By heaven, that's rich!"

His lips curled and he spat at Ka-Zar's feet. The rolls of fat along his stomach quivered in secret mirth.

"Only Janko, the hyena laughs," said Ka-Zar evenly. "Because he is afraid."

DeKraft's eyes narrowed and he hefted the gun in his hand. "Afraid of what?" he snarled.

"Of Ka-Zar, brother of the lion. Kill, Fat-Face, while you have a chance."

DeKraft leered at him and shook his head. Not yet, you man-ape. Plenty of time for that later. First I'm going to show those niggers what they've been afraid of. Then I'm going to show 'em how easy it is to kill you—how easy it is to kill their evil jungle spirit. That'll hold 'em in their place."

Still keeping his gun leveled at Ka-Zar, he threw back his head and roared until the camp awoke with a hundred confused noises. Two of the guards rushed into the tent and stared, speechless with wonder at the bronzed giant of a man, lit up by their master's flash-light.

DeKraft snapped them out of their awe with a string of profanity. Then he spoke to them in their native tongue. "Fetch rope, Bwala. Quick, you dog. And tell your men that I have captured their jungle god. He will never bother them again."

With loud wails the two blacks rushed from the tent. Ka-Zar heard the excited babble of their voices and though he could not understand their strange words, he knew that they were spreading the news of his capture.

There was a great stir and confusion out in the clearing. Many tongues spoke at once, then a voice was raised in a mournful, wailing chant. A moment later the steady, ominous beat of a tom-tom sounded in the jungle clearing.

Ka-Zar's heart picked up a faster beat at the savage rhythm.

"Those devils mean to raise hell tonight," said DeKraft darkly.

Not understanding the meaning of his words, Ka-Zar did not answer. Then, with a shrill buzz of excited talk, the pack of natives had congregated about the entrance to the tent. With head cocked to one side, DeKraft listened to them and what he heard brought a satanic smile to his lips.

A moment later the flap of the tent parted and Aorangi, the chief of the blacks entered. He was flanked on either side by two others who carried lengths of stout rope in their hands. The trio eyed Ka-Zar with frightened glances, then Aorangi addressed himself lengthily to DeKraft.

The burden of his talk was to the effect that the blacks demanded that he give up the evil spirit of the jungle into their hands. They would make a sacrifice of him to the benevolent god of the forest, that their expedition might be blessed and protected from harm.

Fat-Face listened attentively and the more he heard, the more pleased he be-

came. Death at his hands would be comparatively swift and painless. At the hands of the black devils, aroused to a feverish hysterical pitch by their superstitious fears, death would be an agonizingly slow process.

WHEN Aorangi had finished, DeKraft nodded. He spoke a few words in the native dialect and the two blacks that had accompanied Aorangi jumped to Ka-Zar's side. Swiftly they wrenched his hands behind his back, tied them securely.

In stolid silence Ka-Zar had listened to Aorangi's long dissertation. He had not understood one word of it but from the ugly sneer on DeKraft's face, he knew that they were planning his death. He was not afraid, he did not fear death but along with every other animal in the jungle, the will to survive was strong in him.

If he had been Chaka or Diki the jackal or even the wise Zar he might have made a futile break for liberty then. But despite his kinship to the beasts, Ka-Zar was something more than an animal. He had the brain of a man and he knew that it meant instant death from the fire-stick if he made his stand then.

The tying of the rope about his hands indicated to him that he was not to be killed immediately—that he was being made prisoner. An opportunity to escape might come later.

But his hopes were short lived. His hands tied, the two blacks propelled him out of the tent. His appearance was greeted by wild cries and wails from the assembled natives and the tom-tom took up a faster, more savage beat.

No time was wasted. Surrounded by a savage, snarling horde, each man armed with spear or knife, Ka-Zar was rushed across the clearing. Still holding his automatic, DeKraft followed after him, an evil grin on his lips. He

was going to relish this—the niggers were going to put on a swell show for him.

A towering tree stood at the edge of the glade on the far side. Beneath it, the seething mob came to a halt. There was a few minutes of excited talk, then Aorangi raised his spear and commanded silence. He spoke authoritatively for a moment and at the conclusion of his words a fiendish howl rose from the lips of the blacks.

The skin prickled at the base of Ka-Zar's skull and his lips pulled back from his teeth. So these were the Oman—the two-legged creatures—his supposed brothers! Bah! He would have none of them. In their howling and gnashing of teeth they reminded him of a pack of jackals—cowards at heart, fearful to attack when alone but snarling and ferocious when the pack had a helpless quarry at bay.

Ka-Zar had no further time then to make his observation on the nature of the black man. He was seized roughly by a dozen hands; the bonds that held him were cut. He struggled desperately for a moment but the sheer weight of numbers overpowered him. Swiftly his arms were wrenched around the bole of the tree and his wrists tied together once more.

He had been made captive, even as Tuta the elephant. He tested the rope that held him. His muscles knotted and swelled and the veins stood out on his forehead. But the rope was strong and cunningly tied. Even as Tuta the elephant, all his magnificent strength could not break his bonds.

Then at a signal from Aorangi, the tom-tom commenced its maddening rhythm once more. With savage howls the blacks took up their wailing chant again and brandishing their spears and knives began a slow snake dance around their captive.

At the height of the confusion, Ka-

Zar felt something light land upon his shoulder. Then Nono's spidery arms encircled his neck and the little monkey's excited chatter rang in his ear.

He shook his head, smiled in the darkness at the faithfulness of the little beast. "Flee, silly one," he urged. "There is nothing you can do."

Nono whimpered, clung the tighter to his neck.

To save him from the death that awaited him, Ka-Zar spoke sharply. "Go, silly one," he ordered. "Ka-Zar orders it."

STILL chattering, Nono untwined his arms and reluctantly climbed up into the tree.

Ka-Zar sighed a little sigh when he was gone, then gave his attention to what was going on around him. Faster and faster became the rhythm of the tom-tom—faster and faster danced the blacks. Their naked bodies glistened with sweat as they leaped high into the air; their features became distorted, bestial as the steady beat of the tom-tom worked them up to a fanatical pitch.

All their ignorance, their dark fears and superstitions were being expressed in the dance. With their mad gyrations the heart of darkest Africa had come to life. A human sacrifice was to be made that the jungle gods might be appeased.

Ka-Zar watched the ever increasing tempo of the dance with an ever-increasing hate. The insidious beat of the tom-tom got into his own brain, did something strange and inexplicable to him. His blood pounded through his veins, his eyes became hot, his mouth dry.

He was moved by a terrible urge to kill. And he knew that the same urge motivated the black men dancing about him—the urge to kill him—Ka-Zar. With a maniacal fury he strained at his bonds until his head fell exhausted on his mighty chest.

Then sanity returned. The simple dignity of his untrammelled soul asserted itself. He ceased struggling, his head came up and proud as Zar, he faced his death unafraid.

Aorangi, leading the ritual dance saw and in his savage mind, somehow understood. With a loud cry he suddenly darted in from the circle of wildly dancing blacks. His long spear flashed out like the darting tongue of Sinassa and Ka-Zar was aware of a sharp pain in his side, followed by the sensation of hot flowing blood.

Once the first blow had been struck, once the first blood had been let, the other blacks followed suit. Once, during each mad circuit of the captive, each black would dart forward and back again. And each time Ka-Zar would feel the sharp bite of their blades.

With a cunningness beyond belief an ear was nicked, a cheek, an arm, a leg. Ka-Zar understood, then, their dark intentions. His was to be no swift, merciful death. He was to die slowly, painfully from a thousand wounds.

His lips set in a fixed smile. He made no sign of pain, no cry of mercy. Only he strained forward on his bonds to meet the cut of the spear heads as they flashed in at him.

How long the dance would last—how long it would be before he lost consciousness from loss of blood, Ka-Zar did not know. He resigned himself to death and if he had any regrets at his passing, it was that he could not say a last farewell to Zar, Sha and the cubs.

He was occupied with these thoughts, when for the second time that night, something from the limbs of the tree above him, dropped lightly onto his shoulder and again Nono clung to his neck. He was deeply touched by the loyalty of the little animal but he knew that the monkey only courted swift death if he stayed there.

"Go, Nono! Flee!" he ordered.

"There is nothing you can do for Ka-Zar, silly one."

Nono's lips snuggled close to his ear and the monkey chattered excitedly. "Nono is a silly one no longer. Did he not see Ka-Zar with his knife free Tuta from the strong vine that held her. A strong vine now holds Ka-Zar—so. I have brought your knife from the cave."

A swift surge of exultation swept through Ka-Zar's heart. "You are wiser than Ka-Zar, Nono," he whispered. "Ka-Zar never thought of that. Quick. Cut the vine that holds me."

Chattering in his excitement, Nono swung around from Ka-Zar's neck to the back of the tree. Hanging head down by his tail from a low limb, he grasped the heavy knife in the slender fingers of his two hands and began to saw at the rope that held his friend's wrists. He was clumsy, he was awkward, he was slow. He cut as much of Ka-Zar's flesh as he did of the rope.

BUT Ka-Zar did not mind that, did not know it in fact. All he was aware of was that the ritual dance was reaching its climax and that the bonds that held him were giving.

Patiently, laboriously Nono sawed away. Exerting his last ounce of strength Ka-Zar strained at the rope—felt it give, part—then fall away from his wrists. He was free. A moment later Nono pressed the haft of the knife in his hand. The cool feel of it sent the strength rushing through him in waves. He was free and armed and he knew that he would not die that night.

Motionless, his hands still behind the tree, he waited until Nono had swung to safety above him. Then slowly, cautiously he brought his hands forward and the haft of the knife dug deep into his palm.

The circle of dancing blacks about him was narrowing. Their unholy cries made the night hideous.

Tense in every nerve and muscle, his superb body braced back against the tree, Ka-Zar awaited his chance. He ignored the spear thrusts of the crew of lesser blacks and waited till that moment when Aorangi darted in to strike with dripping spear.

Then his left arm snaked out as swiftly as Sinassa strikes. He grasped Aorangi's spear a foot below the point and yanked it savagely to him.

The black was too startled, too amazed to let go. Before he knew what had happened he had been catapulted into Ka-Zar's arms. There was the swift glint of moonlight off cold steel as Ka-Zar's right arm rose and descended in a swift arc.

Then, even as Aorangi's lifeless body was slumping to the ground before the popping eyes of the blacks, Ka-Zar threw back his head and the mighty roar of the lion who has made his kill rumbled from his lips.

To the natives, they had witnessed a miracle. For some mysterious reason they could not understand, their intended sacrifice to the jungle god had not been acceptable. He had turned against them. Speaking with the voice of the lion from the mouth of their captive, he had slain their chief.

With wild howls they fell back, their frenzy of blood lust of a moment before, changed into a frenzy of fear and panic. In their anxiety to escape they knocked wildly into DeKraft who was as equally as surprised as they. There was a moment of utter confusion and chaos. And by the time DeKraft had regained his wits and had fought his way through the milling pack, gun in hand—Ka-Zar had disappeared.

A blind rage consumed DeKraft. With the mad idea of pursuing his prisoner into the jungle he turned and shouted hoarsely at his fleeing blacks. But the natives were pursued by a fear greater than that of the white man's

wrath. They scattered wildly in all directions.

DeKraft realized then, for the first time, the utter panic that had seized them. He knew that it would be impossible to hold them there in the jungle; that by the morning the last man of them would be many miles away.

He went berserk. Snapping up his automatic he fired blindly into the backs of the fleeing natives. From the far side of the clearing a gun answered him—then another and another.

SAFE in the jungle fastness, with Nono perched triumphantly on his shoulder, Ka-Zar listened to the talk of the fire-sticks at the camp of the Oman. The shooting lasted for a long time, then died out. A brooding quiet fell over the jungle.

Proud of his one achievement that night, Nono leaped from Ka-Zar's shoulder to the nearest tree and started gaily on his second adventure.

He was back a few minutes later and made his report. Those of the black Oman who were not dead, had fled; the camp was deserted. And on the morrow there would be much work for Kru and his brothers to do.

Ka-Zar scratched the top of the monkey's head. "It is good, O, wise one," he said with a smile. "And now Ka-Zar goes to tend his wounds and sleep. On the morrow we shall find many bright things for you to play with in the camp of the Oman."

CHAPTER XXI

KA-ZAR THE MIGHTY

KA-ZAR had only one regret in the knowledge that the Oman had fled the jungle. Bitterly he realized that he had failed to slay Fat-Face. And though peace lay once more

over the land, there was none in his heart.

The rising sun found him, with Nono swinging gaily along over his head, approaching DeKraft's deserted camp. There were several things that drew him there. He coveted the shining spears, far finer than his own, and the long knives that the natives had used. He hoped that they had left some in their haste. And if by any chance some of the fire-sticks were still there, he meant to destroy them before they could do any more harm. Nono, or one of Chaka's apes, might find them and curiosity might well prove fatal. Ka-Zar wanted no more tragedy among his people.

While Nono squatted in a tree at the edge of the clearing, he strode into the silent camp. It was evident that its occupants had left in haste. Kettles were overturned. The pans with which the blacks had been busy at the stream, lay strewn on the bank. Only ashes remained of the fires.

Before one of the tents lay a crumpled blanket, with a varied assortment of objects lying upon and about it. Evidently some one had snatched up things at random, gathered them into the blanket to carry them off and when they spilled out, fled without stopping to collect them again. Ka-Zar stooped down to see what they were.

A damp, strong wind blew in from the lake, carrying with it the scent of distant flowers and the sweetish odor of rushes. Otherwise Ka-Zar's keen nostrils would have noticed that the smell of man, always unpleasant to him, still lingered strongly in the vicinity.

When his panic-stricken blacks had left, Paul DeKraft had been possessed by the blackest rage he had ever known. Once more he had a fortune within his grasp—once more his dreams of riches were shattered. First the crazy hermit, now the hermit's even crazier son.

DeKraft's warped soul and evil mind could not stand this second blow. A madness seized him—not the flaring outburst of fury that had made him fire at the blacks, but a scheming, smouldering hate. Like Ka-Zar, he also would know no peace until he had his vengeance.

So all through the long night he had lain hidden in the brush on the fringe of the clearing, a rifle clutched in his hand. Little red devils of hate had glinted in his eyes when he saw the tall figure of Ka-Zar stride into the glade. Lovingly his hands caressed the shining barrel of the gun, but he waited until the advantage was all his own.

When Ka-Zar stooped down over the contents of the blanket, he crept silently forth from his cover. Rising to his feet, he lifted the rifle and with a wolfish grin showing yellow teeth through his beard, aimed its muzzle at the broad bronze back squarely before him.

Up in the tree, Nono did not see him. He was playing with something, utterly absorbed. He turned it this way and that, watching the sun leap from it in arrows of light.

And then, just as DeKraft's finger was squeezing the trigger, one of the blinding arrows of light flashed full into his eyes. The gun went off with a reverberating crash and the bullet sprayed leaves from a nearby tree.

Nono screamed and clutched the mirror he had been playing with. Ka-Zar whirled as he leaped to his feet.

Not twenty feet from him stood Fat-Face. In his pudgy hands was clutched the smoking rifle. His eyes were squeezed shut, as though a needle of flame had scorched them. And as he opened them again, Ka-Zar sprang like a great cat.

DeKraft was knocked flat on his back by Ka-Zar's charge. Before he could regain his breath, fingers of steel dug deep into his throat. The rifle was

wrenched from his hand—and he was helpless.

THERE was no mercy in the tawny eyes that gleamed down at him. If there had been, DeKraft could not have uttered the words to beg it. He was hauled roughly to his feet, shaken until his eyes popped out.

"Your fire-stick failed you," growled Ka-Zar, transferring his grip to the back of DeKraft's thick neck. "You were meant to die by my hand."

DeKraft gulped in great, hungry mouthfuls of air and gradually his face lost its purple color. "Something blinded me," he panted, "or I would have got you."

Ka-Zar looked puzzled for a moment. Up in the tree Nono, now wildly excited, danced and chattered in the branches. Glancing up, Ka-Zar saw his most prized possession, the mirror, clutched in the monkey's hand.

"Nono," he called sharply. "Mischievous one, you have stolen Ka-Zar's shining-stone."

Nono hung his head. "When Nono went last night to the cave for Ka-Zar's knife," he admitted sullenly. Reluctantly he dropped down from the tree to Ka-Zar's back and returned the mirror.

DeKraft scowled. "That's what did it—that's what blinded me. The mirror. I'd like to get my hands around that monk's silly neck for a minute."

Ka-Zar looked at the bit of shining glass that had saved his life. Then carefully he tucked it into his belt.

Disdainfully he surveyed his captive's bulging paunch and flabby body. He took his hand from DeKraft's neck.

"I could kill you with my bare hands," he said scornfully. "Try to escape me and I will."

Into DeKraft's scheming mind stole a new hope. One look at the magnificent body of the bronze giant told him

that he had meant what he said. Though no bonds held him, DeKraft knew better than to make a break just then. But the mere fact that he was not already dead, meant that he might yet get a chance to turn the tables on this naked savage. The little red flames danced in his eyes again and he half-closed his lids to hide them.

Ka-Zar picked up the rifle from where he had thrown it, grasped it by the barrel and quickly smashed it against a rock.

It broke like a matchstick and DeKraft, watching, felt his confidence evaporate a trifle as he realized the strength of those powerful arms.

Ka-Zar turned to Nono and in the language of the jungle, issued a command. "Tell all the beasts that Ka-Zar has captured the leader of the Oman. Tell them to come at once to Zar's cave."

The little monkey jumped up and down, then scampered off into the forest. And Ka-Zar started Fat-Face on his journey toward his final judgment.

"Trained monkey, eh?" said DeKraft, as they stumbled along. "Kivlin—poor Kivlin," he amended with a wry grin, "told me you talked to the animals, but I didn't really believe him until I saw it myself."

"The animals are my people," answered Ka-Zar. "Of course I talk to them."

"Where are you taking me?" asked DeKraft.

"To the cave of my brother Zar, the lion."

To Ka-Zar the answer was a simple one. To DeKraft, it came like a thunderbolt. He stopped in midstride. The crafty gleam in his eyes was wiped out by a dreadful fear. His swarthy face turned a sickly saffron.

"A lion!" he croaked. "You *are* mad! He'll kill us both!"

KA-ZAR surveyed his fat, trembling form with scorn. "Zar is my brother. He will not kill you, unless I tell him to."

If DeKraft had known what was in store for him, the last thread of his sanity would have snapped then and there. As it was, he felt his senses reeling. With his last coherent thought he tried desperately to reason with this crazy giant.

Pawing at the front of his shirt, he pulled out a small pouch, opened it with trembling fingers and spilled a handful of great pebbles out onto his palm. For the first time in his life, his fear was so much greater than his greed that he was willing to share his fortune.

He thrust his shaking hand toward Ka-Zar. "Look," he said hoarsely. "Emeralds—a bloody fortune in emeralds. We can be rich—you crazy fool! Help me pan them from the stream and then we'll clear out together—leave this damn wilderness forever."

It was DeKraft's trump card—his last ace-in-the-hole. He had never yet seen the man who would not do anything for riches.

Ka-Zar gazed down at the pebbles that had brought so much misfortune to him and his people. His amber eyes glowed. Then with a low growl, he struck at DeKraft's hand and sent the accursed stones scattering to the ground.



BY the time they approached the cave, Fat-Face was reduced to a muttering, shambling wreck. He had never learned to control his emotions. Now they swept over him in successive waves, exhausting him mentally and physically. Rage—for the precious emeralds that he had gathered were gone, scattered on the jungle floor. Greed—for the stream still babbled over countless others, just waiting to be looted. Fear—for if this madman did not slay him, the waiting lion would.

By the time he reached the cave and saw not only the lion but a towering elephant move toward him, he could only gaze back at them in numb horror.

Dazedly he heard his strange captor hold a guttural, growling conversation with the two beasts. Then stumbling, in silence, he allowed Ka-Zar to lead him up onto the big boulder. Weakly he sank onto the rock, while the bronze giant stood straddle-legged over him.

In answer to Nono's startling news, the animals came swiftly to the meeting place. Ka-Zar warned Fat-Face not to move or speak. But the warning was unnecessary. DeKraft could not have stirred or uttered a word. His quivering bulk shrank perceptibly each time a beast emerged from the forest. All greeted the sight of hated Om with belows or snarls of rage. All would have leaped upon him, save for Ka-Zar's repeated warning.

They milled restlessly about while others continued to drift in from the jungle. And if DeKraft had entertained any hope that he might escape from the bronze madman, the last vestige of it was gone now. He was completely hemmed in by savage beasts, who looked at him hungrily from gleaming eyes and licked their chops. Ugly apes, snarling leopards, grunting pigs, a watchful elephant, a monstrous snake, mighty lions—one move, and he would be torn to pieces.

At last Ka-Zar addressed the gathering and the snarls and growls died to a murmur. Flinging back his head he stood, a magnificent and imposing figure, towering above the huddled form of the white man.

"N'Jaga has told you," he began, casting a glance at the leopard who crouched sullenly at the fringe of the gathering, "that the Oman are my brothers. You believed. Now their leader is my captive." He looked down at Fat-Face and the murmur swelled for a moment to a concerted roar of rage.

"This Om," continued Ka-Zar, "has taken the lives of many of our jungle people. He must pay for them with his own."

A chorus of approval greeted these words and there was a note of eagerness in it that penetrated DeKraft's consciousness and made him shudder.

"But before this is done," Ka-Zar continued his guttural speech, "we have something to decide among us. N'Jaga has given me a challenge. I will answer it."

He turned to Nono. "Go into the cave. Bring me a knife."

The monkey scampered into the den. While he was gone, the animals chattered excitedly among themselves. They turned to stare curiously when Nono reappeared a moment later, carrying a shining knife which he handed to Ka-Zar.

A hush fell upon the gathering. They had seen that knife bite deep into a kill and they had a great respect for it.

Ka-Zar prodded Fat-Face none too gently with his foot. "Get up," he commanded in English.

Obediently DeKraft crawled to his feet. He was a pathetic figure now. All his bravado was gone. His beard was dragged, his swarthy face beaded with sweat. And his eyes were empty of all but black despair.

FOR a moment he stared at the knife. His eyes widened as Ka-Zar silently held it towards him, haft first. Unbelieving, like one in a trance, he reached out and took it. Dazedly he turned it over and over in his fingers.

Ka-Zar turned back to face the expectant beasts. "Without their weapons the Oman are defenseless. But now this Om is armed. Who among you, will face him in single combat?"

The beasts muttered amongst themselves but none spoke up. Ka-Zar waited until it was evident that no one dared to face the Om with his knife. Then he strode up to confront the surly N'Jaga.

"You talked boldly of slaying," he said. "Here is your chance. Kill this Om now and we will all acknowledge you lord of the jungle."

But N'Jaga, spitting and snarling, only bared his teeth and glared his hatred.

"Come," insisted Ka-Zar. "Whichever one of us slays this Om—he shall be king of the wilderness. Do you agree?"

Eagerly the assemblage assented. N'Jaga, too, reluctantly agreed for his fear was greater than his hate. He, himself, refused to accept the challenge.

"Let Ka-Zar kill," he growled. "If he does, I acknowledge him my master."

That was all Ka-Zar wanted. He turned to Fat-Face. "Come down," he called in English. "We shall fight, without knives. No beast will interfere. You shall have your chance to kill me."

DeKraft hesitated a moment, then as the animals fell back, leaving a cleared space in their midst, he stepped warily down from the rock. He saw Ka-Zar take a crude but deadly knife from his belt, similar to the one he clutched in his hand.

A last vestige of that indefinable something which puts man in a class

apart from the beasts, returned to him. He realized that this was to be a fight to the death and that even if he won, his own life was surely forfeit. But here was an opportunity to kill the madman who had shattered all his dreams of untold wealth. And already resigned to his own fate, he determined that the bronze giant would die with him.

The old light of cunning crept back into his eyes. Clutching the knife, he edged warily forward, circling for an opening.

A hush fell upon the jungle, a hush so profound that even the sighing wind did not stir the leaves. It was a weird, unreal scene. A spectacle as terrible as any ever staged in the old Roman arena. Only here the situation was fantastically reversed. The galleries of the natural amphitheatre were filled with silent, watching beasts. And before them, settling an old score with deadly steel, two men faced each other.

Fat-Face darted suddenly in and his gleaming blade licked hungrily out at the apex of Zar's mighty ribs. But even as its point drew crimson, a bronze hand closed about DeKraft's wrist. His bulky figure was spun violently about, jerked back and clasped against a broad chest. Ka-Zar's right hand described a short, glinting arc through the air. Then it struck downward and his knife buried itself to the hilt in the quivering flesh at the base of DeKraft's throat.

The blade emerged again, dripping fluid scarlet. Ka-Zar stepped back, releasing his hold.

DeKraft died on his feet. His knees buckled and his flabby body crumpled to the ground.

The leaves of the surrounding trees shivered and rustled softly, as though disturbed by the passing of his departing spirit. Then Ka-Zar placed one foot on the body of his slain enemy and tossing back his regal head, roared forth the mighty cry of the lion's kill.

STILL holding the gory blade, Ka-Zar strode over to N'Jaga. "You saw?" he demanded.

"I saw," growled N'Jaga.

"I am your master?" asked Ka-Zar arrogantly.

N'Jaga wriggled uncomfortably; his slitted eyes glowed. "Ka-Zar is my master," he acknowledged sullenly.

He rose and with such dignity as he could summon, stalked off into the forest. Silently his cousins followed.

Satisfied, Ka-Zar walked slowly to where Zar stood before the mouth of the cave. Standing by the side of the lion he turned and confronted the animals once more.

"Ka-Zar boasted before," he said clearly. "Zar still rules the jungle. And Ka-Zar is proud to be his brother. Let no one distrust me again. I am mighty, but I am just. Go your ways in peace."

A chorus of acclamation greeted his speech. Then scattering, the animals went off to resume the life that the coming of the Oman had so briefly but violently interrupted. Ka-Zar was left with his friends and the body of his slain enemy.

Overhead Kru the vulture spiraled slowly down from a sky of clearest azure. A troop of birds gleamed for an instant like a living rainbow as they crossed the path of the sun. And peace settled down once more over the jungle—for a while, at least.



JUNGLE WAR

by Anatole Feldman



KILDAY—Private Kilday of the 104th, was a good soldier. He was husky, raw-boned, two-fisted—and he wasn't blessed with too much imagination. He had soldiered through three major campaigns, survived a shrapnel wound, a machine gun slug in his shoulder and a gassing, without turning a hair.

But lost out here in the jungles of the Philippines, stationed at outpost Nine on Mindanao, with a couple of weary, flea-bitten squads on special detachment, something was beginning to get under his skin. That something was trouble—spelled all in caps.

It was in the air; it reeked in the fetid jungle; it stalked almost openly in the crooked, dirty streets of Lavao. And Kilday sweated and cursed in im-

potent helplessness. It seemed that only he was aware that something was on foot.

Lieutenant Morehouse, commanding the detachment, laughed at him. Sergeant Dake, his immediate superior called him an old woman.

Kilday scowled when he thought of that. He should have expected that from Dake. For a feud of long standing existed between the two. They had nourished it through three hitches in the service together and across six countries. It would one day be settled with blood. They had both promised themselves that.

But Kilday was thinking of darker, more important things than his feud as he sat before a small battered table in the back room of Miguel's joint in

Lavao. Dake was there, too, and Miguel, himself. Cards, chips and a bottle of square-face gin decorated the table. The room was smoke-fogged.

Kilday had lost heavily and steadily all through the evening, just as heavily and steadily as the pile of chips before Dake had continued to grow. Miguel was a half caste and as he dealt his face was a study of mingled emotions. He was at once all-absorbed in the game and yet scornful of the two white soldiers with whom he played.

And his mind, too, like Kilday's was preoccupied with more important things than the cards. Dark things also.

Kilday ground out his cigarette, squinted at his cards, raised and re-raised on three aces. Again he lost to the smirking Dake who had filled an inside straight. With a gesture of disgust he threw his cards into the center of the table.

Was his luck just lousy that night or was . . . He shrugged. "Looks like Lady Luck is giving me the horse laugh," he said ruefully.

Dake sneered. "What's the matter, soldier, can't you take it?"

Kilday's heavy fist clenched on the table. "I can take it from anybody but you, mug!" he challenged.

His face a distorted mask, Dake half rose from his chair. But Miguel the half-caste, smooth and oily, stepped into the breach. "Now, now, gentlemen," he purred softly. "The luck of every man must turn. The wise man awaits the change, then acts swiftly."

Dake subsided into his chair. Kilday lit another cigarette. He sensed a sinister import in the half-caste's remark. And after all, he wasn't playing poker that night to win money—he was playing to find out things. He indicated the three blue chips before Miguel but his question implied other things.

"And just when do you expect your luck to change, Miguel?"

"Soon—very soon."

Their eyes met a moment, held. A smile curled on Miguel's lips and then was gone. Kilday's heart picked up a faster beat.

"Come on, guy—deal," snarled Dake impatiently.

Too impatiently, thought Kilday as he shuffled the cards. The play was resumed. Kilday was interested in the game—decidedly interested. Yet he found himself studying the swarthy face of the half-caste opposite him. Miguel was a man of mystery. But of one thing, he, Kilday, was sure—the half-caste was capable of any villainy his evil brain might conceive.

Playing with grim concentration, Dake continued to win. Kilday essayed to draw out Miguel further but the Filipino failed to rise to the bait. A half hour passed and then, just as the bottle of Squareface was emptied, a fellow soldier pushed through the door.

DAKE raked in the pot, scowled up at him. "What the devil brings you here, McGee?"

Private McGee grinned broadly. "Don't worry, sweetheart. You're safe. I'm looking for Sam." He turned to Kilday. "The C. O.'s looking for you, buddy. And from the look on his face you've got a load of grief waiting for you. Better high-tail it back to camp and see if you can square yourself."

Kilday growled. "He would be after me just when I'm out plenty." He shoved back his chair, pushed his handful of chips across the table to Miguel. "Count 'em up. If I don't have to spend the rest of the night in the guard house I'll be back."

Dale toyed with the mountain of chips before him. "Swell. Bring another bankroll along with you."

If Kilday needed any reminder that he had lost steadily all evening, that sufficed. He fished a packet of brown

paper cigarettes from his pocket. As he selected one the packet dropped from his hand to the table. And when he scooped it up and returned it to his pocket, another small object went along with it.

"You've got my dough," he called over his shoulder to Dake as he followed McGee to the door. "But one of these days, sweetheart, you're going to get my fist in your face!"

All the way back to camp Kilday was thinking of trouble—the trouble that was creeping into his bones. And trouble arrived with a bang when he stepped into the C. O.'s tent. But not the trouble he had expected.

Lieutenant Morehouse rose from his chair as Kilday clicked his heels, saluted smartly. The Old Man's voice was cold, emotionless when he spoke.

"Been to town, Kilday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Without leave?"

"Yes, sir."

The C. O.'s lips tightened, his nostrils dilated slightly. "Kilday, I have had you on the carpet a dozen times for breeches of discipline . . ."

"Yes, sir. But . . ."

"Silence!" roared the lieutenant. "This is the last time, Kilday. Consider yourself under arrest. In due time you will be court-martialed, sent to Leavenworth, if not worse."

For the first time Kilday sensed that his offense was something far more serious than going A. W. O. L. to Lavao for a game of poker.

"But, sir," he protested. "I don't understand?"

The C. O. glared at him, turned abruptly to his desk and snatched up a scrap of paper lying on it. "Maybe you understand this better. It was found in your bunk, hidden there."

Kilday took a step forward, squinted down at the paper. On it was a crudely sketched, yet very accurate and detailed

plan of Number Nine Outpost.

A hot rush of blood surged to his head. "You mean to say you're accusing me . . ."

"Silence!" rasped Morehouse. "Kilday, you're a damnable disgrace to the uniform you wear. Your coming to me with tales of your suspicions was very cute—very cute to cover yourself up." He smote the desk with his fist. "If there's any trouble brewing, you're behind it."

Kilday was shocked by the gravity of the charge; stunned by the knowledge that someone had framed him for a traitor. He realized then how his frequent visits to town without leave, had taken on a new and ugly significance in the mind of the C. O.

The Lieutenant raised his voice, called to the sentry posted outside the door. "Tracey!"

The guard entered, presented arms.

"Kilday is under arrest. Place him in the guard house," said Morehouse. "He is to speak to no one. Double guard. If he tries to escape, shoot to . . ."

But Kilday had heard enough. A great surge of bitterness welled up within him. The C. O. refused to listen to him. Once he was imprisoned there would be no one to uncover the devil's mess that was brewing on the Island. There would be . . .

His indignation gave way to anger. On the last, ominous word of the Lieutenant's command—to shoot to kill—he lunged forward.

HIS attack was swift, sudden, violent. His fist lashed out, connected solidly with the sentry's chin. There was a dull chopping sound. Tracey staggered back and the Lieutenant's desk went over with a crash as Morehouse leaped forward.

Kilday cleared the door a fraction of a second before Morehouse had cleared

his side-arm. A heavy automatic boomed behind him. Death sang over his head; a leaden slug nicked him in the shoulder.

He dodged wildly to the left. Behind him pandemonium reigned. The cries of the guards took up the alarm. Running feet pounded across the outpost. Rifles cracked and crimson streaks of flame stabbed through the night.

Panting, Kilday reached the wooden palisade at last. His muscles flexed, tensed. He leaped up, clutched at the spiked top with bleeding fingers, pulled himself up and over.

He landed running and speeded on by a barrage of lead from behind he vanished into the encroaching jungle that hemmed in the outpost.

It was long past midnight when Kilday by devious routes crept once again through the streets of Lavao. The shopkeepers in the center of the town had long since put up their shutters for the night. The dull blob of yellow that marked the lobby of the Inglaterra Hotel on the plaza, was dimmed. The respectable section of Lavao, what little there was of it, slept.

But down along the *calle* that paralyzed the quay, a mysterious night life of its own was still seething. Moros, Malays, Chinese and an occasional riff-raff white drifted through the littered streets, vanished like shadows into dark doorways and blind alleys.

Calle de Espana was a bit of the Orient. A pungent odor redolent of spices, fish and unwashed humanity hung heavily about it. Its narrow length was lined with grog shops, the dingy stores of small ship chandlers, gambling dens.

And it was down this street that Kilday made his way cautiously. His many visits to Lavao had taught him at least one thing that helped him now. There was more than one house on *Calle de Espana* that would harbor a renegade—for a price.

He had not lost all his money in the poker game earlier that evening. Now he pressed a banknote in the greedy palm of old Tomas, a cut-throat rascal and was in turn ushered into a small, filthy room.

He stretched himself full length on a narrow cot, covered by a tattered and incredibly dirty blanket. His thoughts were bitter as he wooed a sleep that would not come.

Traitor and deserter! He clenched his fists in impotent fury. Someone had framed him. He could not believe that anyone, even a bitter enemy, would have gone to such lengths to even a score. Barred from the Outpost he would have a difficult time getting proof against the man who had done this thing. But when he did . . .

The bitter-sweet thought of vengeance was followed by a yet more terrible one. He was not being paid off for an old grudge. No. Someone wanted him out of the way—someone had realized the true reason for his visits to Lavao. And that someone, though he was loathe to believe it, was the real traitor!

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became. A white man was behind this unrest. For years the Moros had been quiet. Without the aid of a traitor from within, they would not dream of rebellion.

But with that aid . . .

Kilday had a fleeting vision of brown hordes surging over the wall of the sleeping Outpost; of shrill war cries and blood-lust on sweating faces; of gleaming *krises* dripping warm scarlet.



THE first faint light of dawn tried to penetrate the grimy window of his room when he fell at last into a restless, fitful sleep.

It would have been folly to appear in the streets during the day. While the minutes dragged wearily into hours, Kilday paced the floor of his squalid lodgings. He smoked countless cigarettes. He sat for a while on the edge of the cot, fretting with the forced inaction. Then, when at last the sudden twilight of the tropics fell over Mindanao, he stole forth.

By a circuitous route through the jungle, he cautiously approached the Outpost. Hidden in the dank growth as the night deepened, he strained his eyes and ears in watchful waiting. From the other side of the palisade he heard the voices of his erstwhile comrades.

There were the usual requests for cigarettes or matches; the usual assertions that the wheel at Miguel's was crooked. But his own inexplicable conduct was the main topic of conversation. Once a remark, in the unmistakable voice of Sergeant Dake, brought a low growl from Kilday's throat.

It was a long wait. He longed for a cigarette but dared not light one. He thought of the warmth and light of the dives along the *Calle de Espana*, but he stuck grimly to his post. And at last his patience was rewarded.

Whether it was a matter of minutes or hours that he had waited, he never afterward knew. But the snapping of a twig suddenly sent his pulse to a faster beat. He narrowed his eyes, peered into the gloom.

A dim, blurred outline moved out from the blacker shadow of the Outpost wall. It headed for the jungle and treading as silently as the night itself, Kilday slipped after it. Ten yards further on he recognized the moving shape as a native. His mind leaped ahead to the conclusion that the man had been

in communication with the traitor within the Outpost. And Kilday decided that he wanted, very much indeed, to have a few questions answered.

If he once got his hands on that elusive shadow, he had ways of making the man speak. The Moros had small fear of naked steel in a fight. Yet an iron fist to the jaw worked wonders. It was an infallible way of loosening tongues.

They slipped through the jungle, unsuspecting quarry and grim-faced pursuer. Kilday lengthened his silent, cat-like stride; shortened the distance between them. Then, gathering his muscles for the leap, he sprang.

His outstretched hands clasped about a slippery body. There was a grunt. Then the native squirmed in his arms and even in the dim light Kilday saw the wicked gleam of steel.

"No, you don't!"

His fingers closed about a wrist, like bands of steel. With a sudden wrench he jerked the Moro's hand up and back. Warm blood, not his own, wetted Kilday's fingers. Then with a squeal, a grunt, the native wriggled free and darted along the jungle path.

Kilday cursed, sprinted after in hot pursuit. But once alarmed, the Moro was not to be caught again. The jungle was his native home and reaching out its arms, it engulfed him at once in a protecting mantle of blackness.

Kilday saw the futility of further pursuit. Still cursing himself bitterly for letting the man escape, he slowed down to a dog-trot, then at last to his usual long stride. Wearily he headed once more in a half circle back toward Lavao.

Kilday had a double reason, now, for wanting to uncover the dark plot which he felt was afoot. He not only wanted to warn the Outpost of an impending outbreak, but he had to uncover the white man behind it to clear his own name.

By the time he reached Lavao he had decided that there was only one lead for him to work on. Somewhere, and the chances were that it would be along the *Calle de Espana*, he would find a native with a knife wound in his shoulder. And when he found him much might be solved.

He made his way there. As unobtrusively as possible he looked in on Miguel's place. But there he found neither Dake nor Miguel, nor the man he sought. From there he visited each dive and grog-shop in turn. And in each place he became increasingly aware of dark looks cast in his direction; of insolent brown faces and muttering words spoken behind his back.

THERE was a growing tension in the air. The fact that he was branded a traitor and a deserter did not explain it. The natives were indifferent to the white man's honor or dishonor. It was something more than that, something far more sinister.

It was an hour later that he ran into his man in a small cafe at the far end of the *calle*. His only means of identification was a dirty, blood-stained rag that was wrapped about the upper part of the man's right arm. But that was enough.

Kilday ranged up at the bar. He ordered a shot of *ginebra*, toyed with it for a while. Then when at last his quarry went out, he trailed after him.

When he reached the street, the wounded Moro was disappearing swiftly into the distance. Keeping as well in the shadows as possible, Kilday followed. For ten minutes the chase continued along the waterfront.

Then suddenly Kilday flattened himself in a dark doorway. His quarry had stopped before the shabby entrance of a small, dingy boathouse. A hasty glance up and down the street and the Moro made for the door of the place.

With the sound of the door closing behind him ringing in his ears, Kilday leaped out of his hiding place and followed.

Under cover of the misty gloom that drenched the dockside, he advanced cautiously on the boathouse. He darted across the *calle* and flattened himself against the bamboo fence that surrounded the building. It was just too high for him to look over and it looked far too rickety to bear his weight, if he should attempt to scale it.

Beyond, the shabby building looked still and foreboding. No light showed. But not two minutes before the native had entered there and Kilday had a strong hunch that others stirred within. The silence and the darkness hinted of evil being plotted there.

Kilday dismissed at once the idea of entering the main gate. Surely it would be guarded. He figured that he had a better chance of approaching the hide-out from the water itself.

He followed the bamboo fence, turned the corner and continued toward the lapping waters of Lavao Bay. Here the fences dragged off into nothing but a few rotting posts. Several *bancas* and *vintas*, pulled up on the beach, blocked his further progress inward. Straight ahead of him lapped the water.

No hope of approaching from that direction. And Kilday's impatience scoffed at further caution. With a characteristic gesture he turned about and swiftly retraced his steps. Heedless of the danger he strode up to the door, struck it with a broad shoulder and burst it violently inward. The suddenness of his movement unbalanced the native who had been leaning against the fence post.

Before the Moro could regain either his wits or his balance, Kilday's fist lashed out—a jolting, stiff-armed right to the jaw. With no more than a guttural grunt and a hiss of escaping

breath, the guard pitched forward into Kilday's waiting arms.

The sting of his knuckles was balm to Kilday's restless soul. Here was action, at least.

He grinned down at the inert form in his arms. "You guys have all got glass jaws," he told the unhearing Moros. Then shouldering his limp burden he carried it to an open boat that stood on chocks within the enclosure. Roughly he dumped him across the thwarts, concealed his victim from prying eyes with a piece of old tarpaulin.

A hasty glance about him showed that no alarm had been raised. Swiftly he crossed the littred yard and brought up beneath a low window.

The low drone of voices drifted out to him. From the variety of guttural tones Kilday judged that there must be a dozen men in the room beyond. Only occasionally did he understand a word. But the few syllables that he did get were terrifying ones!

Knives! The Outpost! The death of the wretched whites!

KILDAY wanted to hear more—had to hear more. Somehow he had to get inside that room. Without hesitation he fished a clasp knife from his pocket, inserted the long thin blade between the sash and the sill. He exerted a slight pressure, but nothing happened. He bore down harder, but the ancient frame refused to budge.

With a snort of impatience he leaned all his weight against the blade. And with a scream of rusted pulleys the window shot up. A fraction of a second later there was another noise—a sharp report as a bullet drilled the glass and whined above his head.

Cursing, he jumped sideways and turned toward the gate. With a leaping heart and a pounding pulse he saw at a glance that his escape there was barred. Four Moros were charging

down upon him, knives glinting savagely in the pale light.

They were on him before he could bring even his clasp knife into play. He was overwhelmed at once by a flurry of arms and legs, but the very numbers of his attackers was their undoing.

At the first assault, Kilday had fallen flat to the planking. Here he wrapped his brawny arms around the tangle of weaving legs and heaved mightily. The natives squealed and shrieked; hacked futively with their knives.

A sweating, odorous body crashed down on Kilday. A brown hand clutched at his throat and dug deep into his windpipe. He jerked up a knee and with a cry of pain his attacker rolled clear. The point of a *kris* made a burning scratch across his shoulder. He thrashed convulsively, managed somehow to roll free of the crushing weight of his attackers and staggered to his feet.

Reversing his direction he raced down the wharf, plunging across the slimy planks, and dove cleanly into the water. Bullets sent up miniature geysers where his head had just disappeared. And when at last he had to break the surface for a lungful of air, he was fifty feet away from the rotting jetty.

The Moros saw him, shrieked an angry chorus. Before they could fire again he ducked under water once more, swam for his life. Heading straight out into the bay, he came up at last behind the protecting hull of an anchored sloop.

Kilday knew full well that he was now in double jeopardy. Traitor and deserter. And now, if he were to be seen and recognized by one of the Moros who had attacked him the night before, he could hope for nothing more than a *kris* between his ribs.

He had plenty to think about all that next day. Yet when nightfall came again he knew that he would never be

content to stay forever in hiding. So when the lights sprang on along the *Calle de Espana*, he ventured forth to whatever the night might bring.

The cafe where he had first picked up the trail of the wounded Moro was patronized only by the natives. So to there he betook himself. The small room was crowded to overflowing with men whose faces were brown or yellow. With the exception of a shabby, tattered individual, obviously an American who leaned against the bar, Kilday was the only white man in the place. The babble of alien tongues rose on the smoke of vile tobacco and the natives, with insolent braggadocio, jostled roughly and pointedly against Kilday as they moved between the tables.

Something warned him and suddenly he felt the need of communion with one of his own kind. The tattered man at the bar was at least a Yank. Kilday shoved his way across to him, leaned shoulder to shoulder with the man across the bar.

"Have a shot on me?" he suggested.

From beneath straggling hair, a pair of keen gray eyes surveyed him. "Why not?" he answered slowly. "From the looks of things around here, we might be wise to get acquainted."

Kilday looked at his companion with more interest. "You see that, too?" he asked soberly.

"A blind man could see it," answered the other shortly.

THE door of the cafe opened. A Moro entered, took three steps across the threshold and then halted in his tracks. His eyes riveted on the figure of Kilday, standing at the bar.

To Kilday, one native looked much like another. But the gleam of recognition in the other's eyes told him that here was one of the men he had battled with the night before. From the corner of his lips he whispered hoarsely to the

white man beside him: "Look sharp, Yank! It's coming, now!"

The Moro's mouth opened. A shrill jabber of words poured forth. And instantly every man in the cafe grew rigid, then whirled to face Kilday.

The bartender was the first to go into action. From somewhere on his person a knife materialized, leaped to his hand. The savage blade flashed hungrily at Kilday's back.

The ragged Yank, though, was a trifle quicker. In that fraction of a second while the blade descended he wielded the gin bottle from the bar and smashed it into the barman's wrist. The cold steel fell with a ringing clatter.

Without waiting for more the two white men made a break for the door. Knives flashed. Bottles flew. Clawing hands clutched at them. A babble of furious cries echoed in the room.

The Yank snatched up a rickety chair, smashed it over brown shoulders and heads. When it was splintered to matchwood in his hands he flung it away. Kilday's iron fists struck out at snarling faces. Shrill cries of pain echoed the thuds of blows. The skin of his knuckles cracked, burst open, poured forth warm blood.

Battling for their lives the two men made the door. Slashing knives ripped their clothing to ribbons; drew blood again and again.

"Come on—run for it!" called the Yank.

Kilday felled the last man who blocked his path with a sledgehammer right, darted through the open portal after his newfound comrade. They dodged around the first corner, raced off down a narrow alley, cut back on their trail behind a row of flimsy rattan huts and arrived at last, panting and weary, in the house of old Tomas.

Up in Kilday's room they washed and bound as best they could their in-

numerable cuts. Kilday eased himself down on the edge of his cot, let the breath out of his lungs with a long whistle and shook his head.

"We're lucky we got out of that place, with our skins."

The Yank found a cigarette, lit up. Now, upon closer inspection, Kilday realized that the man was tall and rangy, powerfully built. His temples were touched faintly with gray. And there was something about his steady gaze, his cool manner, that fitted incongruously with his torn and shabby clothes.

"What started it all, anyway?" he asked quietly.

"I did," answered Kilday. Then, on a sudden impulse he told the Yank his story. Told of his suspicions, of his visits to town, of his arrest and his desertion, of the boat house.

The tall Yank listened in silence. And when he had finished, nodded.

"I'm Judd, Army Intelligence," he said. "Your suspicions are well-founded. I've been investigating the same thing. But you've gone farther than I have, in finding that boathouse. I knew the devils were meeting somewhere but so far I haven't been able to get a clue."

He inhaled, exhaled twin spirals of blue smoke. A frown made a deep V between his level brows.

"Your hunch about a traitor in the Outpost is bad news. I learned that the natives have gotten arms, but I thought they had been stealing. A plan, like the one they found in your bunk, would be dynamite in the hands of the Moros."

For a moment there was silence between them. Then Judd's head snapped up. He dropped his cigarette to the bare floor, ground it out beneath his heel. "I was getting an earful before you came in the cafe and things busted wide open. I believe they're

going to strike tonight. We'll have to work fast."

Kilday leaped up from the cot. "The Outpost—they'll have to be warned. I can't show my nose there and besides, the C.O. will listen to you. You'll have to hotfoot it there." He blew tenderly on his swollen knuckles, managed a grin though the effort made his scratched and bleeding face smart. "Me, I'll head for the boathouse. If the brown devils are gathering there—I'll hold 'em till you come. Better bring some of the boys along—we'll need 'em."

MAD though it was, it was the only possible plan. And while Judd made all haste to reach the Outpost, Kilday, by devious paths, headed once more for the boathouse. The *Calle de Espana* was suspiciously deserted. The silent, empty street presaged trouble.

But his talk with Judd had vindicated him. And now that the final chance to clear himself had come, Kilday was ready to take it. He made directly for the stronghold of the plotters.

Throwing discretion to the winds, he boldly approached the main gate in the bamboo fence. To his surprise it opened at the pressure of his hand. Unthinking, he entered the yard beyond, crossed to the entrance of the building. Silence. Utter silence.

The second door stirred at his touch. He should have known better—should have been warned by the ease with which he entered. But the scent of the trail was too strong in his nostrils. He slipped inside, advanced a foot; two feet. And then the door closed softly behind him.

Alert as he was, they were too swift for him. Strong arms imprisoned his own; a smothering blanket was thrown over his struggling figure. Desperately he tried to free himself of its folds. Time and again he flung off his attack-

ers by flailing his arms wildly about him. Occasionally a dull thud and a snarl told him that one of his wild blows had landed. But sheer weight of numbers pinned him down. Exhausted, he sank finally to the flooring.

They worked swiftly, efficiently. When he had been trussed up, his arms neatly pinned to his sides, they dragged him roughly to his feet. He was half led, half pushed across a doorway into an inner room. There, a last push sent him unceremoniously into the midst of the gathering which he had been seeking.

For a moment the blinding light, after the deep gloom of the outer passage, blinded him. He blinked his eyes rapidly before they focused correctly on his surroundings.

He found himself standing in the center of a mob of scowling natives. And directly before him, his arms folded and his smooth face like a polished mask, stood Miguel.

Kilday met the scorn in the slanted eyes by drawing himself up to his fullest height. "You, eh?" he said. "I had a hunch you were mixed up in the dirty work, somewhere."

Miguel was unperturbed. "I am very sorry that you came here," he answered softly. "I shall miss you in the poker games."

Kilday's retort was drowned by a stir behind him. He looked around. The crowd of natives had parted and a familiar figure moved toward him.

A cold rage numbed Kilday's heart. And in his mind the dislike of years crystallized into a black, unforgiving and uncompromising hate. For the man who moved so easily in the midst of these bloodthirsty Moros was none other than Sergeant Dake. Kilday's fingers itched to close around the man's lying throat; a low growl welled up from his own.

Dake came to a halt, straddle-legged,

before the prisoner. "Looks like your luck is still lousy," he taunted.

Kilday's mind was working at top speed. "So it was you that framed me, eh?"

Dake laughed. "It was me, sweetheart. You were getting too noseey, so I made you the goat. Not sore, are you?"

"No," growled Kilday. "Not a bit. Just let me get my two hands around your neck and I'll prove it."

Involuntary Dake fell a pace before Kilday's blazing eyes. It was all the latter could do to clench his teeth and fight back the words that rose in his throat. This man—in the uniform of the United States Army—was betraying his comrades into the hands of the Moro renegades. The gorge in Kilday's throat threatened to choke him.

DAKE suddenly found no joy in baiting him. He signalled to Miguel. "Take him into the store room. I'll be with you in a minute."

In grim silence Kilday permitted the half caste to lead him into a small cubicle opening off the main room of the boathouse. And as they entered, even though his captive was bound, Miguel's hand crept into his shirt front.

His slitted eyes gleamed. "I advise you, Senor Kilday, to be careful," he warned.

The door, fitted with a new spring lock had clicked shut behind them. "Saving me for the mob?" he asked.

"The Sergeant and my fellow patriots are even now deciding your fate," answered Miguel. "You shall die, of course—and at once. The matter to be settled is—how? Every man yearns to have the pleasure of slitting your throat."

Kilday's collar suddenly felt too tight. His breathing came heavier. By a series of mental calisthenics he tried to figure out how much time had elapsed since he and Judd had parted, tried to figure

out when Judd would arrive here at the boathouse. He gave it up, realized just one thing. He had to stall for time, had to mastermind something, anything, to forestall the inevitable.

He looked at Miguel's impassive features, thought idly that in this moment of crisis the half-caste showed far less emotion than he did over the gaming table. The man's passion for stud poker . . .

A thought flashed into Kilday's whirlwind brain. He remembered something.

"What would you do, Miguel," he asked softly, "if you knew that Dake was double-crossing you?"

Miguel's eyes gleamed. "He would not dare."

Kilday snorted. "Oh, no," he answered sarcastically. "Say, that guy has been making a monkey out of you all along. If you don't believe me, look in my pocket."

The half-caste hesitated. Then his curiosity getting the better of his caution he moved forward, thrust a hand into the pocket Kilday had indicated. It came out again, this time clutching a small object.

"Look it over—very carefully," suggested Kilday.

Miguel did. With bated breath Kilday watched him. He saw a slow tide of dull crimson rise up beneath the man's swarthy skin. Miguel's whole body grew tense, quivered with a suppressed excitement. And while he studied the object in his hand, Kilday worked frantically on the bonds that held his wrists—felt them loosen. In another few minutes . . .

"Where did you get this?" Miguel asked in a hoarse whisper.

"From the table in your back room," answered Kilday. "I picked it up after our game that night."

From beyond the door came the atavistic roar of the Moro mob. Then knuckles rapped on the portal.

The mask had dropped from Miguel's face. It was transformed into a visage as scowling, as ferocious, as that of his bygone jungle ancestors. He leaped catlike to the door, shot back the lock and swung it inward.

Dake strode into the room and the portal clicked shut once more behind him. He looked at Kilday and his twisted grin was not a nice thing to see.

"They all want the pleasure," he announced. "So I'm turning you over to . . ."

Then for the first time he noticed the transformation of Miguel, confronting him. He fell back. "Say—what—what's the matter?"

For answer, Miguel whipped his hand out of his shirt front. The light glinted off twelve inches of tempered steel.

Dake saw his own doom reflected in the half-caste's slitted eyes. He waited for no more. An automatic sprouted into his fist and he pumped lead at the man who charged forward with the knife.

Miguel's body jerked once—twice—three times—as bullets thudded into his flesh. The knife blade sailed from his nerveless fingers. His swarthy face turned a dirty ashen color and his knees buckled.

WHILE Dake had been engrossed in this sudden, unexpected attack, Kilday had finally succeeded in freeing himself from the rope. And now, before the sergeant had quite recovered from his shocked surprise, he leaped forward.

Dake heard him coming, whirled. The heavy automatic in his fist snapped up.

But Kilday's charge was too fast. His head landed solidly in Dake's stomach and the gun exploded in his face. Flame and powder singed his eye-brows. Then his right hand froze around the sergeant's gun wrist.

Beyond the door the Moros had heard the shots. Now in a clamoring throng

they assaulted the door. The hinges groaned and creaked but the spring lock held. Kilday, struggling furiously for possession of the weapon, breathed a silent prayer that the portal would not give. If that screeching horde broke in upon them he literally would be hacked to pieces.

In vain Dake tried to wrench his hand free. His fingers jerked convulsively on the trigger. Bullets sprayed splinters from the ceiling above. Grimly Kilday hung on while his left battered at Dake's face.

Then, from the passageway through which he had entered the building, came a sudden uproar. Sharp cries of alarm, squeals of fear, the staccato rattle of gunfire.

With a mighty effort, Dake wrenched his gun hand free, stepped back. His finger constricted greedily on the trigger. The gun roared. A bomb exploded in Kilday's brain. The impact of the slug spun him half around.

He smashed to the floor on his face and echoing the crash came another as a squad of dough-boys led by Judd and Morehouse battered in the door.

Whiskey burned Kilday's battered lips, scorched his throat, stung him back to consciousness. Groggily he climbed to his feet, looked blankly about at the blurred figures that swirled about him.

Then his eyes focused—the shapes took form. There were khaki uniforms, the glint of rifles and a half dozen ragged natives sprawled on the floor. Everyone was moving, talking at once—save those grotesque heaps at his feet.

Judd's face materialized before him, then the one of Lieutenant Morehouse. The C. O. steadied him with a friendly hand. "Good work, Kilday," he said warmly. "My apologies. The Company's apologies. How you making it?"

With a bloody hand Kilday wiped the fog from his eyes. "Swell, sir," he grinned. "A slug in the shoulder. But

it wouldn't have been so swell if you and the boys hadn't arrived when you did. I was through. Did you get him—get Dake?"

The C. O.'s eyes narrowed; his jaw hardened. "We got him, all right and a damn sight more than that. We found another map on Miguel, more detailed than the one that was planted in your bunk. It was in Dake's handwriting. And when we found a thousand dollars in bank notes on him, he talked. Came clean."

There was a sudden commotion at the far side of the room. His wrists encircled by glinting handcuffs, guarded by two soldiers, ex-sergeant Dake was dragged towards the door.

Kilday could not resist a final parting shot. "Just a minute, boys," he called. He staggered forward, confronted his old enemy from straddled legs. "You're a rat, Dake," he said evenly. "I always knew that. But I'm sorry you're going out this way."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," answered Kilday. "I'd much sooner have it out with you, myself—man to man." He shrugged. "You thought you were smart when you trimmed me a couple of nights ago in that poker game with your crooked deck of cards, didn't you?"

"So what?"

Kilday laughed harshly. "You were too smart. I palmed one of those cards at the end of the game. It was marked—easy to read if you looked for it. Well, I showed it to Miguel when you stepped out—and he didn't like the idea of being cheated, either."

Profanity drooled off Dake's lips.

"Sure," smiled Kilday. "And when he jumped you with the knife and you bumped him with the gat—I had the break I needed. That crooked card gave me that break—and that crooked card is going to march you up against a brick wall."

FATAL TREASURE

by Beech Allen



THE hanging lantern, swaying with the gentle motion of the ship, failed to reach the dark corners of the cabin. Seated at a heavy table beneath it Matthew Gregg, for the thousandth time, carefully unfolded a ragged sheet of ancient parchment.

Subconsciously his ears registered the muted sounds outside—the subdued putter of the motor launch plying between the shore and a large liner anchored well out in the harbor, the whisper of the darkened waters lapping at the sides of his schooner, the slap-slap of bare feet on the deck outside.

The last supplies had been brought aboard and under the supervision of McLaren, his partner, the last preparations for the journey were being made. In a few short hours, at dawn, the

Nancy Kay would leave the harbor of Port of Spain behind her and head out into the open sea.

With an effort Gregg stifled the fever of excitement that set his pulse to a faster beat. Concentrating all his senses on the fragment of yellowed parchment before him, he studied it until a frown made a deep notch between his eyebrows.

The markings on the chart were scarcely legible, faded with time. With a calloused forefinger he traced them over, then dropped his eyes to the laboriously-printed verse below.

Slowly he lit his pipe and once more reread the familiar but meaningless jingle.

*Ye who woulde solve this arteful
riddle*

*Must begin at the ende and not in
the middle*

*At the toppe of the highest moun-
tain*

At the bottome of the bluest sea

*The treasure lies guarded by the
magick moon's witcherie.*

Gregg scowled at the map before him. A bit of ragged parchment. Yet it conjured up visions of proud galleons that sailed the Spanish Main, of rakish pirate craft that swooped down upon their helpless prey, of thundering cannon and drawn cutlasses. And, what was more to the point—visions of gleaming gold and priceless jewels—the treasure of the great pirate Morgan.

The island was Trujillio, of course. Anyone who knew the Carribean could have told that from its outline. But the location of the treasure, the clue which must be in that senseless jingle . . . Gregg sighed. For a week the words had hammered mockingly in his brain, yet he had failed utterly to interpret them. Maybe when he actually set foot upon that lonely isle, he would . . .

The door of the cabin opened. Roused from his reverie he looked up—looked up to see the broad back of his partner. And over McLaren's shoulder, as he backed into the room, the lamplight fell upon faces dark, distorted and unmistakably evil.

With a low cry Gregg sprang to his feet, sending his chair clattering over backward. "Tollman!"

The lamplight glinted now off the barrel of a gun dug deep into McLaren's stomach. With a wolfish grin the man who held it acknowledged the name.

"Right. Sancho! Pedro! Get him!"

At the order, two swarthy men leaped forward. Gregg saw them coming through a sudden reddish mist of rage. Tollman and his crew of cutthroats—the scum of Trinidad—he did not need to ask what they were after! A black

rage possessed him; with a bellowing curse he flung himself at the foremost of the pair sliding in at him.

His bronzed fist lashed out, landed on the point of a bony chin. Pedro crashed backward, cracked his head against the side of a bunk and slithered limply to the floor. Sancho leaped forward and a knife lanced through the air.

Gregg's foot caught the hand that held it, sent the blade spinning. But thus off-balance, the Spaniard's rush crashed him to the floor. They tangled, their bodies straining. The lilt of the ship rolled them over across the floorboards. Their fists flashed and landed; their legs pumped like pistons. They hit the table, rebounded; sent chairs flying. Above the resultant clatter Gregg heard Tollman's shouted orders, heard the lone cheer of his captive partner.

Sancho kicked at his shins, gouged at his eyes. His own fist battered at the Spaniard's body, bringing grunts of pain. With a sudden agile twist Gregg rolled over, clambered on top. He jerked his right hand back. Sancho saw his intention, knew the lethal power of the blow that was coming and flung a protecting arm across his face. And then, just as Gregg started the swing, the rest of Tollman's crew surged into the cabin.

Gregg was pinned down by their sheer weight, battered into helplessness by a rain of blows. His head was rocked by a tattoo of iron fists, his body assaulted by heavy boots. His body became a single, racking torment; but a keener agony still was the knowledge that he had lost.

A nausea gripped the pit of his stomach. A rising tide of blackness rose up and engulfed him.

WHEN Gregg came to, he was vaguely aware of a murmur of voices. For a few moments the nausea

returned and the voices were forgotten in the retching convulsion of fighting it. Then at last the paroxysm subsided and the words registered clearly on his brain. He recognized the throaty bass of Tollman and realized that the cut-throat crew were arguing his own fate.

"Finish him," suggested someone coldly.

"Throw him over the side."

"Let Pedro have the pleasure, it's coming to him."

"Not so fast, my buckos," growled Tollman. "I'm head man here."

With an effort Gregg forced open his eyes. He found that he was lying in his own bunk. McLaren, his hands clenched into impotent fists at his sides, sat on the edge of the bunk opposite. Tollman stood under the hanging lantern, his crew crowding round him, the precious chart in one hand. He rubbed the stubble of beard on his long jaw with the other.

"I think we'll take Mister Gregg with us. I ain't going to cheat Pedro out of his fun. But before we feed him to the sharks we got to remember this thing." He made a gesture with the chart. "This jingle means something and Mister Gregg is going to tell us the answer."

All Gregg's anger flooded back in a swift tide. Painfully he heaved himself up to a sitting position. "I don't know the answer to that riddle, Tollman," he answered grimly. "But if I did, you'd never get it out of me."

The men whirled on him, muttering angrily. But Tollman only showed his teeth in an ugly grin. "I'm giving you plenty of time to think about it, Gregg. You'll either figure this thing out—or be damn sorry that you didn't. Throw them in the hold, men. Both of them. We're going to up anchor and set sail for Trujillio."

Resistance was futile. Docilely, but smouldering with resentment, Gregg

and McLaren allowed themselves to be pushed forward and dumped unceremoniously into the hold. The hatch was battened down above them.

Alone, they squatted down on the *Nancy Kay's* bottom plates, braced themselves against a bulkhead. Above on deck they heard the rumble of the anchor chain, the tramp of feet around the capstan. Bitterly Gregg reflected on the irony of his situation. He was sailing for Trujillio, all right, at dawn—a prisoner on his own ship.

The capstan gave a last protesting screech; tackle clattered noisily. Then with a sibilant murmur the water washed past the sides of the *Nancy Kay* as she headed out to sea.

"You put up a good fight," said McLaren gloomily. "Me, I didn't even have a chance. They must have slipped over the side without a sound and I turned around to find Tollman's gun in my middle. Got the cook and the other boys before I knew what it was all about."

"Not your fault, Mac," answered Gregg. "We didn't expect trouble. They must have got wind of the chart somehow, probably spied on us. But they haven't got that treasure—yet."

There was that in the way he said the last words that gave McLaren new hope. "That's right, too. But suppose Tollman guesses that riddle? Or if he doesn't, and you don't either, they'll probably murder us either way. Down here—what can we do?"

Gregg was silent for a moment. "I don't know, yet," he admitted at last. "Nothing right now. But you can take it from me, Mac, that when we get to Trujillio—things are going to happen."

It was a nightmare journey. There in the darkness of the hold, buffeted about by the seas that battered at the staunch hull of the schooner, Gregg fed his soul with the corroding acid of a bitter hate. Time became meaningless.

Once the sullen Pedro, armed to the teeth, brought them water and biscuits, bent his dark eyes upon them in a glance that boded them no good, and silently departed.

It was the booming round of the sea breaking over a reef that finally jerked them both to rigid attention. Then the clatter of the chain as the anchor was dropped brought a hot flush of fever to Gregg's cheeks.

A swaggering ruffian opened the hatch above them, peered down. "Bail out, you two. You're wanted up on deck."

HE emphasized the command with a significant jerk of the gun in his hand. Stiffly Gregg and McLaren climbed from the hold. In silence they were herded toward the poop.

The sun was setting in a blaze of flaming glory. Its slanted rays made a broad path of magenta across the gray-green sea, patterned a rocky headland in orange light and mauve shadows, illumined a mountain peak. Gregg steeled his nerves against a racing pulse as he looked at last upon the island of Trujillio.

Tollman was waiting for them at the rail. At a curt command from their guard, Gregg strode up to join him. Tollman leaned against the taffrail, waved a hand at the island and grinned.

"There she is, Mister. On the other side is the sea. On this side is Trujillio. You've reached the end of your journey, Gregg. Whether you go on the island, or whether you get thrown in the sea, depends on you. Have you solved that riddle yet?"

Gregg's eyes wandered past him, drawn irresistibly to the shore line of gleaming white sand. A white lip of foam marked the reef that blocked the entrance to the lagoon. It was tantalizingly close. Not two hundred yards of

gray-green water stretched between it and the sheer side of the ship.

The fury that had smouldered within Gregg all that day suddenly burst into flame. He whirled about to face Tollman and his answer burst passionately from his lips.

"No!"

His fist shot forward. And to punctuate the word, his knuckles cracked the point of Tollman's bony jaw.

He did not wait to see whether the man fell. In a single movement he cleared the low rail, hurtled through the air and dove cleanly into the sea.

He came up with laboring lungs, kicked out immediately in a fast and powerful crawl. Shouts came to him over the water—the hoarse cursing of Tollman—then the ominous bark of a gun. A wave broke over him in a shielding shower of foam, then as it subsided he kicked out again.

Other guns joined the angry chorus. Bullets kicked up spurts of spray dangerously close. Then came the scream of davits as the small boat was lowered. Tollman and his crew tumbled in. There were hurried orders, made sharp by profanity. Oars slapped the water, propelled by strong arms.

Another burst of lead sprayed geysers of water in Gregg's face. He heaved himself up suddenly, then sank from view. His strategy was the signal for wild cheering from the small boat. But while Tollman was congratulating his men on their marksmanship, he was swimming powerfully under water.

There was a tight smile on Gregg's lips that belied the granite hardness of his eyes, as he pulled himself out of the water and crept cautiously across the narrow strip of sand that girdled the Island of Trujillio. At all events, he mused bitterly, even though he had been stripped clean, even though he had lost the gallant *Nancy Kay*, he had arrived at his objective.

And something told him that when once again the schooner sailed—with or without the treasure—he would again be in command.

Concealed behind a low ledge of outcropping rock, he gazed seaward. The small boat had long since given up the search for him and had returned to the *Nancy Kay*. A half dozen glowing lanterns bobbed about erratically on the schooner's deck. Then, as he watched, the small boat pulled away from the ship's side, once more, and with long strokes headed for the shore.

It was crowded with a handful of bulky forms but the lanky silhouette of Tollman stood out sharply in the stern. Up in the bows, a man standing guard behind him, slumped McLaren.

Poor Mac, thought Gregg! He thinks I'm food for the fish by now. Taking it hard. Too bad. But he and Tollman will have to think that for a while.

THE lingering twilight was suddenly extinguished like a spent match. The sudden night of the tropics descended like a sable cloak, blotting out the island behind Gregg's back. But before him on the water, a winking lantern marked the progress of the skiff.

He heard the boat ground, heard the splash of feet as it was pulled up on the beach. Indistinct with distance came the sound of muffled voices. He crept forward cautiously; wished for the feel of a gun butt in his fist.

Tollman's throaty bass came to him. He was issuing orders to Sancho. They were to camp there on the beach for the night—and the camp was to be guarded. From the further drift of his words, Gregg learned that Pedro and two others of the pirate crew had remained aboard the schooner.

For a moment he debated with himself the advisability of trying to recapture the *Nancy Kay*, then decided in the negative. He couldn't handle her alone,

even if he wanted to flee the Island; and he wouldn't be able to hold it against the combined attack of Tollman and his men.

No. Now that he had arrived at the Island, his play was to stay there until the treasure was found. Time enough then to cross swords—his hands constricted into knotty lumps at his side—or fists, with Tollman.

The treasure hunt would begin with dawn on the morrow. He had a short eight hours to make sense out of an apparently senseless jingle.

*" solve this riddle
Must begin an the ende and not in
the middle . . . "*

Over and over the cryptic words raced through his mind until they lost for him what little meaning they contained. It was maddening.

As cautiously as he had advanced, he retreated, worked his way back a few hundred yards from the beach, through a dense tangle of undergrowth and squatted down on his heels, his back against the large trunk of a tree.

He began his vigil, alone, empty handed, conscious of the fact that the odds were terrifically against him. But more than anything else he missed the soothing comfort and inspiration of his briar pipe.

The Island about him was alive with a thousand night noises but Gregg had ears only for the obscure sounds that came from Tollman's camp. The night wore on slowly. The cryptic riddle of the chart echoed insistently in his brain.

Over and over it he went. He started at the beginning, at the end—at the middle. He skipped lines, transposed them—read them forward and backward. But no matter what interpretation he gave them he could not possibly see how the treasure could be, at one and the same time.

*"At the toppe of the highest mountain,
At the bottome of the bluest sea."*

Bloody Morgan had hidden his treasure well. And the secret was still his, as far as Gregg was concerned, when a pale dawn flushed the east.

Tollman's camp came to life. There was a hurried breakfast washed down by flagons of rum. Then the hunt began, with the elusive shadow of Gregg trailing the party from the beach to the mountain peaks and back again. They dug here, they dug there—they dug everywhere but where the treasure was buried.

And the only satisfaction that Gregg got out of the proceedings was the knowledge that Tollman, even as himself, had failed to decipher the riddle.

The sun was just setting in the west when Tollman's party returned at last to their camp on the beach. They were weary, tired, hungry—and empty handed.

With a mocking smile, Gregg listened to their grumbling and profanity for a few moments from his place of concealment, then faded back into the rank underbrush.

It was hot, there by the beach breathless. The myriad of insects were a torment. He climbed for higher ground to rest and ponder for the thousandth time on the baffling riddle that mocked him.

On the top of the high promontory that overhung the lagoon, he threw himself to the ground. He drank deep from a bubbling spring but the cool water failed to assuage the hunger that gnawed at his vitals.

RELENTLESSLY he put the thought of food from his mind. He would work on that damnable riddle scientifically, methodically. He would take it line by line, word by word—wring the meaning from it.

With dogged determination he began. The first line was simple enough. Over the second he puzzled his brows and shook his head. At the third, he glanced unconsciously up at the peak of the highest mountain; at the fourth glanced down to the blue waters of the lagoon below him.

And a miracle was born in his brain! The riddle was solved! Or at least most of it.

For there, reflected in the deepest blue waters of the lagoon below him *was the top of the highest peak on the Island.*

That had to be it—had to be the answer. Gregg's heart sang with exultation, his head swam. Then with a mighty effort he steadied himself. He had to make sure, go slow. He dare not make any mistakes. In the light of this new knowledge, how was the riddle solved? Once more he mumbled the opening couplet of the riddle:

*Ye who would solve this arteful
riddle
Must begin at the ende and not in
the middle.*

Of course! It was perfectly clear—obvious. He had been a fool not to have seen it before. *Must begin at the end of the day—at sunset!* For only then would—

*. . . the toppe of the highest
mountain meet
. . . the bottom of the bluest sea.*

It was all ridiculously clear to him then. The treasure lay in the lagoon at the spot marked by the shadow of Mt. Alba at sunset.

The last line of the riddle, about the treasure being guarded by the moon's witcherie, was nonsense to him. How could the moon affect treasure buried under the water?

He didn't know; but he determined to find out.

Swiftly he made his way down to the edge of the lagoon. There was no beach. The water dropped away sheer at his feet. Fortunately he was hidden from Tollman's camp by the high headland that rose up precipitately from the water's edge at the far side.

Behind him the bald top of Mt. Alba was bathed in the red glory of the setting sun. And some ten yards before, its fiery crown was cooled in the depths of the blue waters of the lagoon.

Gregg kicked off his shoes, stripped his shirt and pants. For a moment he poised himself on a huge boulder, took his last bearings, inhaled deeply, then dove cleanly into the water. The splash of his out-stretched hands shattered the reflection of the mountain. Sapphire water closed over his head. The surface of the lagoon was agitated for another few moments by ever widening circles. Then once more the glory of Mt. Alba was cooled in the deep.

With powerful strokes Gregg fought his way down. The water was crystal clear and he had little difficulty in surveying the silver sanded bottom. Little difficulty for yet another reason, for the floor of the lagoon was bare of anything that remotely resembled a golden florin, to say nothing of the pirate's treasure.

He was conscious of a pang of bitter disappointment as he struggled to keep himself below the surface. In those few seconds a thousand thoughts assailed him. Was there no treasure after all? Was the chart with its riddle a hoax? Or had he read the riddle wrong?

No! He would have staked his life that that was not the case. The different pieces of the puzzle dove-tailed too well for that. There was only one alternative. The whole thing was a hoax. He had been duped.

His straining lungs warned him that he needed air. Wearily he jerked up

his head, arched his back, kicked his feet and propelled himself towards the surface.

He had not been conscious of the incoming tide but it had irresistibly swept him in towards the precipitate shore. And then, just as the bitterness of his disappointment was eating out his heart, he saw it—an aperture in the rocky wall below the surface of the water.

WITHOUT thinking he kicked his feet again, made a powerful stroke with his arms and propelled himself through the opening. Stygian gloom engulfed him and a moment later his head shot unexpectedly above water.

For a moment he trod water while he got his breath and his bearings. The gloom was not so obscure now, as his eyes became accustomed to it. He looked curiously about him. Ten yards ahead of him land showed, sloping up steeply. With a surge of exultation he realized that he had found the underwater opening of a cave. Was it possible that it was Morgan's cave—that it held the treasure that had haunted him for days?

With powerful strokes he headed for the rocks at the far end of the cavern. Indifferent to the havoc wrought on his shins he clambered up them. The cave extended before him back into the rocky fastness of the Island.

Wildly now, with the mad gleam of treasure trove in his eyes he plunged forward. The rocks beneath his feet were wet and slimy. The floor of the cave was uneven and treacherous. He fell a dozen times in the darkness but did not mind. He could think of nothing but gold—gold!

And then, piled high against the rear wall of the cave he fell against brass bound sea-chests, ponderous, nail-studded trunks. They were green with mould, sea weed and age. They bulged; their rusted hinges hung by threads.

Gregg's heart constricted in his throat, his eyes bulged. His mouth was suddenly hot and dry, his brow clammy. Savagely he wrenched at the lid of one of the chests and it fell away in his hands. And there, revealed before his hungry eyes was the gold—the treasure he had dreamed about but never had hoped to find.

There were Tuscan florins, British sovereigns, Spanish pieces of eight. The jeweled loot of seven seas winked invitingly up at him.

He plunged his hands in, then drew them away as if he had touched fire. With an effort he steadied himself. He realized that he was acting like any gold-crazed man. He had found the treasure, and now, more than ever before, he had to keep his head.

He suddenly became aware that water was lapping at his feet. Incipient panic claimed him.

Hastily he seized a handful of the gold pieces, turned and plunged back the way he had come. The water rose rapidly about him. He had difficulty in locating the mouth of the cave.

Twin pulses hammered at his temples and ironically enough, in that moment, he understood the meaning of the last line of the riddle.

He found the opening to the lagoon at last, snatched a hasty lungful of air and dove through it. The water from the lagoon fought him back—back, back to destruction. Desperately he kicked with his feet, flung out with his arms, clawed at the slippery sides of the bottle neck.

A brass gong beat inside his skull. His lungs threatened to explode. A wave of blackness assaulted him. Then he was in still water once more, fighting his way blindly to the surface. His head shot out of water, he sobbed for breath. Then weakly clutching his handful of gold pieces, he started for the shore.

For long hours that night Gregg hovered on the outskirts of Tollman's camp in a vain effort to make contact with McLaren. But the guard was vigilant and he dared not run the risk of capture. Slowly, majestically the stars wheeled across the dome of heaven. The hours dragged, futile, bitter hours for Gregg, now that he had located the treasure.

The inactivity gnawed at his soul. But there was nothing he could do just then. He could only wait and hope that the guard became careless—that he nodded off for a few moment's sleep. Sleep! Gregg suddenly realized that he hadn't had any for forty-eight hours. His eyes ached, his body—every nerve and muscle cried out for it.

A cat-nap would do him good. Just forty winks. And by that time, perhaps the guard, too, would have nodded. He stretched on the ground and before his head was comfortably settled against a rock, he was fast asleep—the sleep of exhaustion.

TO Gregg, it seemed, that he had had only half of that promised forty winks, when something cold and hard prodded him to wakefulness. Reluctantly he forced open his lids, then they flew wide as his eyes focused on the grinning face of Tollman bending over him.

And then he made the second startling discovery that it was the muzzle of Tollman's automatic that was prodding him in the ribs.

He heaved himself stiffly to his feet. With sleep fogged eyes he looked around at Tollman's crew that hemmed him in. The sun had cleared Mt. Alba and was already arching across the sky. He saw McLaren, closely guarded, scowling blackly from the edge of the group.

And then the fog lifted from his brain. In a blinding flash he remembered. The

cave—the treasure—his forty winks of sleep. Forty winks! He had slept for hours—and here he was with Tollman's gun at his ribs!

Tollman's thin lips pulled back in a sneer. "So you didn't drown, my pretty?"

Gregg shook his head bitterly, more at himself than at the other. "I'm no ghost, if that's what you mean."

"We'll see what we can do about that later," said Tollman heavily. He hefted the automatic in his hand. "Where you been?"

"Places."

"Yeah? Did you mastermind that riddle yet?"

Gregg's eyes flickered unconsciously as he shook his head. "No," he answered evenly. "Did you?"

But Tollman had seen the movement of his eyes and he was not deceived. His thin nostrils dilated suddenly and his cold eyes became deadly. He sank the muzzle of his gun deep into Gregg's flesh.

Gregg suddenly remembered the handful of gold-pieces in his pocket. If those were discovered—

He side-stepped swiftly. His right fist lashed out, shattered against Tollman's jaw. Tollman staggered backward and his gun exploded as his arms shot up. The bullet singed Gregg's hair.

Then like a pack of hungry wolves, the mob was on Gregg. He battled furiously, with the desperation of one against many. But his gallant attempt was doomed to failure. The odds were too great against him. By sheer weight of numbers they bore him to the ground.

He worked his fists until they were battered pulp. Bodies catapulted away from the kick of his lashing feet. Then simultaneously the needle point of a knife pricked him in the throat and Tollman's gun again ground at his ribs. The fight was over.

Pedro yanked him, battered and bleeding to his feet. Tollman flattened him again with a crashing fist to the mouth. And as he crawled on hand and feet in an effort to rise, the hand full of gold pieces spilled from his pocket.

There was a cry, a sudden surge forward as the men scrambled in the dust for the gold. But Tollman leaped instead for Gregg. Savagely he yanked him to his feet by his belt, spun him around.

"So you did find the treasure, you lying dog!"

Gregg nodded. "Aye, I found it," he answered bitterly.

"Where is it?"

Gregg's puffed lips twisted in a mockery of a laugh. "Solve the riddle yourself," he mocked.

In a sudden, insane fury Tollman grasped him by the throat. "I'll choke it out of you."

Gregg's face was purple but he shook his head. "Never," he managed to gasp. "It'll die with me."

And Tollman realized that he meant what he said. He was possessed with the mad impulse to kill. But greed and cupidity mastered him. His grip on Gregg's throat suddenly relaxed. He spun abruptly around, sank his gun into the back of the helpless McLaren.

"You might be fool enough to die with the secret, Gregg," he said slowly. "But are you willing to see McLaren, your partner, die?"

Gregg struggled with the emotion that threatened to choke him where Tollman's hands had failed. "Good God!" he gasped. "You wouldn't do that!"



AND Tollman knew that he had won. His sneer was eloquent. "Wouldn't I? What the hell is McLaren to me? Nothing! Not a damn thing! He's in my way. I'd shoot him as soon as breathe. It's up to you, Gregg. Does he live or—"

Gregg's shoulders slumped. The fire died out in his eyes. "He lives," he said thickly. "I've solved the riddle, all right. I've found the treasure."

"Where?"

Gregg motioned vaguely towards the lagoon. "Come on. I'll show you."

Tollman promptly removed his gun from McLaren's back and transferred it to Gregg's. And thus, in this fashion, the procession started for the shore of the lagoon.

The eager, exhilarated mood of the others made Gregg's gloom the deeper as he led the way. He paused at last on the edge of the rocky shoreline. From the open sea the incoming tide tumbled over the reef, but inside the lagoon the water was crystal clear. The sun was already well up but no shadow darkened the placid stretch before him. Directly beneath him, hidden by the water, was the opening of the cave.

McLaren hung back, brooding in self-reproach. The others crowded around Gregg, openly eager. Only the lean face of Tollman betrayed a slight shade of skepticism.

"Go on," he prompted. "We're here. Where's the treasure? What's the meaning of that riddle?"

Gregg took a deep breath, squared his shoulders and with his precious secret, paid the price of his partner's life.

"The meaning is simple, once you tumble to it," he began slowly. "Begin at the end—means begin at the end of the day—sunset."

Tollman grunted. "So what?"

"At sunset," continued Gregg, "the top of Mt. Alba is reflected here in the

lagoon. Get it? At sunset the top of the highest mountain is at the bottom of the bluest sea. That's where the treasure is—there's a cave . . ."

There was a sibilant hiss of escaping breath from his circle of listeners. Tollman seized his arm. The light of skepticism had vanished from the man's eyes and his face was flushed, beaded with tiny drops of perspiration. He shook Gregg roughly.

"The cave," he demanded hoarsely. "Where's that cave?"

"Right beneath where I'm standing," answered Gregg. "But . . ."

But Tollman waited for no more. A strange, animal-like sound issued from his throat. He kicked off his shoes, dropped his gun.

In swift alarm, Gregg snatched at him. "Wait! For God's sake—wait!"

But the lust for gold had blinded Tollman's eyes, dulled his ears to the warning. With an angry snarl he knocked Gregg's arm aside, flung back a vile oath and before anyone could stop him plunged head first into the water.

Acting on impulse, Gregg ran to dive in after him. But poised on a jutting rock, he hesitated. A stream of bubbles came up through the water, marking Tollman's downward course. And with an icy numbness constricting at his heart, Gregg knew that it would be hopeless to follow.

From wide eyes he looked out to where the rip tide was boiling across the reef.

Fascinated by the swift disappearance of Tollman, his men crowded up beside Gregg, dropped to their knees in an effort to probe the depths beneath them. In the intensity of their excitement they did not see McLaren steal softly forward. He stooped over and when he straightened up again, Tollman's gun slipped swiftly into his own pocket.

A last bubble broke, then once more

the surface of the lagoon became a still mirror. Slowly the seconds passed. The men stirred restlessly, muttered to each other. The seconds dragged into minutes. Then at last one of them looked up and when he saw the grim set of Gregg's jaw, he leaped quickly to his feet.

"What's happened? Where's Tollman?"

The others joined him, their faces anxious. Gregg faced them squarely.

"He's found Morgan's treasure," he answered quietly. "But he'll never come back with it."

"A trap!" snarled Pedro. "You sent him into a trap!"

WITH the words his hand flashed to his hip. But before he could draw, before his companions could follow his example, a cold voice spoke from behind them.

"Up with your hands—all of you!"

They whirled. Facing them, his legs

straddled, a heavy automatic in his hand, stood McLaren. Slowly, reluctantly, they reached for the sky.

Swiftly Gregg moved to his partner's side. "Good work, Mac." He turned then to face the circle of sullen faces before him. "Just to keep the records straight, I didn't send Tollman into a trap. He was too greedy to get the gold, too greedy to wait until I had finished. I tried to warn him. If he had waited I would have explained the last line of the riddle to him.

"If you remember, it goes like this: *The Treasure lies guarded by the magic moon's witcherie.* Well, the moon's witcherie is—the *tide!* It's death to go into Morgan's cave at high tide. You can't get out!"

He pointed to where the surging sea pounded over the reef and the eyes of the men followed him.

"As you see," he finished slowly, "the tide's at the flood. Greed and gold don't mix."



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PEARL MAGIC



by James Hall

THEY sat in the rear room of Kittredge's shop in Papeete. The soft night air, laden with the scent of tiare blossom, sifted through the slatted screen that covered the open window. Kittredge, the jeweler, drummed with his fingers on the top of his desk.

"I have a commission for you," he said to his visitor.

Hugh Rayburn sat with one hip hitched up on a corner of the desk. He ran a bronzed hand through his dark hair.

"Good! I'm busted—flat. I need a stake badly. It's either a berth back to the States—or the beach for me."

Kittredge nodded. "If you can get what I want, you can go back first class.

I have been commissioned to procure a pearl, or pearls, for a customer of mine. They must be flawless, black—and of enormous size. If you can get them, I will share my commission equally with you. And in this case, the price will be a small fortune."

Rayburn squinted thoughtfully at the ceiling for a moment. His lips opened, but before he uttered a word, his head snapped abruptly about.

The slatted screen over the window had stirred. As he shot a glance in that direction, he saw what had caused that furtive movement. The light from within the room was reflected for a brief instant in a pair of eyes that peered through the slits of the screen. Then they were gone.

Rayburn slid from his perch, sprinted through the shop beyond, burst out of the front door into the deserted street. The window of the office gave onto a narrow alley that paralleled the building. He plunged at once into the shadowy passage.

The thin cracks of light that filtered through the screen only gave a faint patch of illumination at the far end of the alley. And Rayburn's actions had been so swift that the intruder had not yet escaped. They collided violently in the gloom, with an impact that brought grunts from their lips.

RAYBURN lashed out with his right fist at the shadowy form of his adversary, missed by inches. The other kicked savagely at his shin, the toe of his boot smashing against the bone with a force that sent stabbing pain shooting through every nerve and muscle.

Rayburn struck out again, this time with a pile driver left. His knuckles caught the prowler on the side of the jaw, sent him toppling over sideways. He landed on hands and knees in the dust of the alley. But before Rayburn could fling himself upon him, the man had scrambled to his feet and scuttled off.

The screen rattled up and the terrified face of Kittredge peered out.

"Rayburn! What—what happened?"

Rayburn sucked a bloody knuckle. "Nothing," he said bitterly. "Whoever he was—he got away."

The opened window now threw a square patch of brilliant light across the passageway. And it illumined something that brought a quick interest to Rayburn's eyes. He knelt down to examine it more closely.

In the dust, where the man had fallen, was the plain imprint of a hand. And running diagonally across it, from the base of the thumb to the little finger, was the mark of a long scar.

He rose once more, went back the way he had come and reentered the shop. The elderly jeweler stared at his bruised hand, his eyes wide.

"Somebody," Rayburn told him, "must have been interested in our conversation. Unfortunately, I didn't even get a look at him there in the dark." He shrugged. "I don't think he'll come back in a hurry. We can finish our business."

Shaking his head, Kittredge led the way back into the office. This time, although the place was sultry inside, he closed the window before he sat down.

Rayburn fished in his pockets, found a cigarette, lit up. "About those pearls. Old Kariti, on Manu Situ, has made a thorough clean-up of his lagoon. He's kept it closed for years and it must have been simply lousy with shell. If anybody has the pearls you're looking for, he has them."

Kittredge nodded. "Good. And the sooner you start, the better. I'll advance the expenses. You can pay me back from your share of the profits." He reached into the top drawer of his desk. "And here—take this. Match that for size and color and you can reserve the finest suite on the next liner out."

He placed a pearl in Rayburn's bronzed hand. It was of monstrous size, black with a rosy fire that glowed in its smoky depths. Rayburn rolled it around on his palm a moment, held it up between thumb and forefinger to a better light. Then he tucked it carelessly away into the top of his wide belt.

"This'll be my last trip," he said, and left.

The voyage should have been a pleasant one. The weather had been ideal. By day the sky was a turquoise immensity, clear and cloudless over a cobalt sea. By night it was a star-sprinkled canopy of deepest azure, brooding and serene. The native crew moved about

the deck, singing haunting Polynesian love songs as they worked.

Yet for all that, Rayburn was uneasy. He had had to take the lumbering old schooner *Coral Queen*, because she was the only ship available. And he had no liking for her skipper, Samoa Jack. True, Samoa Jack had confined himself for the most part to his own cabin, communing there with a bottle of whiskey. But the psychic sixth sense that comes to the wanderer of the far corners of the earth, hinted of unseen trouble. And it was with a sigh of relief that he stood at the rail when the *Coral Queen* swept through the gap in the reef and dropped her anchor in the still lagoon of Manu Situ.

SAMOA JACK had come on deck with the sight of their landfall. His harsh, rasping voice had poured forth a steady stream of commands, beche-de-mer English interspersed freely with lurid profanity. Now he strolled, straddle-legged, his hands thrust into the pockets of his dirty white ducks, to where Rayburn stood at the rail.

"You want to go right overside, I suppose?" he asked.

Rayburn glanced at the beach. He could make out the figure of old Kariti, still erect despite his many years, surrounded by a group of his young men on the beach. He nodded curtly.

Samoa Jack spat over the side. He turned and called hoarsely over his shoulder.

"Taku! Matatiro! Where the devil are you, you scuts! Get a boat overside! Jump!"

Two stalwart Polynesians hastened to carry out his orders. Rayburn climbed over the side while the boat swung easily under the lee of the schooner. Powerful bronze arms grasped the oars and they skimmed across the still blue waters of the lagoon.

He jumped out as the nose of the boat

grated up onto the sand of the beach, strode up to meet the old chief. Kariti's wrinkled face gave him a smile of welcome.

"Many years you no come to Manu Situ, my friend. I am glad for see you."

He shook hands gravely with Rayburn. Then with a wave of his hand, he dismissed his followers.

"Come. No talk on beach."

Rayburn saw Taku and Matatiro push off once more for the *Coral Queen*. Then he followed Kariti up the tree-lined trail that led upward from the beach. Tall pandanus and coconut palms shaded the narrow path that led up to the hut of the chief.

"I come now on business," said Rayburn. "I come to buy pearls."

Kariti nodded. "I have pearls—many pearls. I show you."

They crossed a small clearing, entered the hut. From a niche high up under the thatch roof Kariti took down a bundle, tied up in a faded cloth. He squatted on the earth floor, pried open the knots that held the bundle, carefully opened out the cloth before him.

Rayburn's eyes opened wider. A low whistle escaped his lips. He crouched down opposite the old chief.

Nestling on the ragged bit of cloth was a shimmering heap of pearls. They were all sizes, all colors, yet each a perfect, glowing sphere.

Kariti made a gesture with a thin, claw-like hand. "You honest. I sell you."

Rayburn had no need to look at the pearl old Kittredge had given him. He reached out toward the treasure heap before him, picked out an enormous black pearl. Then another. And another. Regretfully he shook his head.

"I cannot buy them all. They're worth a king's ransom, this lot you've got here. But I want these."

He knew pearls. He looked down at the three perfect, lustrous ones in his

palm. Then he reached for the money belt that Kittredge had given him.

THERE was no need to bargain. Kariti took the money, wrapped the rest of his hoard once more in the faded cloth and stowed the bundle back in its hiding place. Then he escorted his visitor to the door of the hut.

"Samoa Jack—that bad man," he said. He shook his head. "You be careful."

"Don't worry," Rayburn assured him. "He doesn't know what I came for. I might be arranging for a shipment of copra or anything else."

He wrapped the pearls carefully in a handkerchief, tucked them into his breast pocket. Then he bade the old chief farewell, and started briskly down the trail.

Despite his reassuring words to old Kariti, the Chief's warning was not forgotten. It brought back the vague uneasiness, the foreboding that had been with him from the start of his journey. He felt that the ease with which he had accomplished his mission was deceptive; felt that the Fates had been kind to him only to play with him, that they would yet turn maliciously on him.

As he made his way down the sun-dappled trail he scented trouble. But he did not suspect that it would come as soon, and as suddenly, as it did.

He turned a bend in the trail—and pulled up abruptly. Confronting him, blocking his path, stood Samoa Jack. The man's ugly features were twisted in a malicious sneer. And in his hand, pointing squarely at Rayburn's belt buckle, was a revolver.

"No funny moves, Mister," the skipper's harsh voice ordered. "And you can hand 'em over."

Rayburn eyed him coldly, made no move. To reach for the Luger at his hip would have been suicide.

"Hand what over?" he retorted.

Samoa Jack's twisted smile widened. "Garn—none of that. I'm wise, Mister."

Frantically Rayburn's mind sought some possibility of escape.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said evenly.

Samoa Jack's grin faded, was replaced by a black scowl. He stepped forward menacingly, shoved the gaping muzzle of his gun forward until it was a bare six inches from Rayburn's middle. "I know what you came for. I want those pearls. Shell out—and damn fast. Or I'll blow you to bits."

There was no disregarding the finality of his rasping words. A cold impatient rage filled Rayburn as he reached reluctantly into his breast pocket, drew out the handkerchief that held the pearls. Samoa Jack thrust out his free hand, seized the bundle with greedy fingers. As he fumbled it for the feel of the gems within, Rayburn relaxed a trifle. He hooked his hands into the top of his belt.

His elbows sagged, pulling the webbing outward. A dark, spherical object spilled from the belt, dropped to the ground at his feet. Hastily he thrust out his foot to cover it, but he was too late. Samoa Jack had seen it—the pearl that old Kittredge had given him back there in Papeete.

"Holding out on me, eh?" he gloated. Still cautiously covering Rayburn with the gun, he stooped down, raked in the gem with his fingers, straightened up again. He spared his new find a glance. "Whew! What a beauty!"

RAYBURN watched him from stony eyes as he stowed away the gems. "Too good for a rat like you," he said grimly. "I'll see you in hell before you cash in on them."

"Yah!" Samoa Jack stepped in close again, thrust his mocking face before Rayburn's. "If a shot wouldn't bring

old Kariti and his pack on the run, I'd blast you right now. Instead. . . ."

Rayburn saw the murder flare to the skipper's eyes. But before he could guess the man's intention, Samoa Jack's arm flashed up. The glinting weapon described a short, vicious arc. Then it smashed with a sickening thud against his temple. The vivid green of the trees and the bright gold of the sunshine were instantly blotted out by an impenetrable blackness.

The blow had been meant to kill. Why it had not smashed his skull like an eggshell, Rayburn never afterwards knew. When he came to it was to find the friendly faces of Kariti and his men looking down at him.

Weakly he struggled up to a sitting position. For a moment he sat, dazed, dizzy, unable to remember what had happened. Then his head cleared a trifle. He looked wildly about him.

"Samoa Jack," he croaked. "Pearls . . . schooner . . ."

Kariti shook his head. "Schooner—gone."

"Gone?" The word rang in Rayburn's brain and a momentary panic possessed him. He scrambled to his feet, staggered down the trail toward the beach. He burst out of the undergrowth at the edge of the strip of sand and his eyes gazed feverishly out across the lagoon.

It was empty, still, placid. He strained his eyes beyond the coral reef toward the open sea. And he saw the sails of the *Coral Queen*, low down upon the horizon.

He swayed a moment, giddily, on his feet. Then he cursed softly, bitterly. With those pearls had gone his last chance. He would buy no first class passage back to the States from Tahiti. He was penniless, broke, stranded on Manu Situ. It might be weeks, or months, before a trading vessel came through that

reef. And when it did—he was worse than broke. He was indebted to Kit-tredge for the expenses of the trip, for the money he had paid Kariti for the pearls.

The old chief and his men came down the trail, clustered about him. With a mighty effort of will Rayburn fought down the black despair that gnawed at his heart. He squared his shoulders, threw back his aching, throbbing head.

"A boat," he said to Kariti. "I must have a boat. I must get to Tahiti."

Kariti looked at the frail canoes, with their outriggers, drawn up on the beach. He flung up his hands.

"You mad."

He was right, and Rayburn knew it. The idea was insane, ridiculous, absurd. Yet even as he looked at the circle of brown faces about him, half-pitying, half starkly amazed at the suggestion, he knew that he would attempt it. Better to go to his death out on that blue immensity of ocean than eat his heart out on that lonely atoll.

THE old chief saw the grim set of his jaw. In vain he tried to dissuade him. Rayburn shook him off, headed across the beach. They called after him, then seeing he paid no heed, subsided into silence.

His head buzzed strangely and the glare of the sun against the white sand made his eyes ache. Stumbling across the sand he made for the nearest of the dugouts. It was an ancient craft, its matting sail tattered and torn. Rayburn looked it over, then shrugged indifferently. It didn't matter.

Just before he pushed off, one of Kariti's men sprinted down across the strip of beach. He placed a calabash of water and a bunch of mountain feis into the prow of the canoe. Then he stepped back and watched from sombre eyes as the mad white man headed out across the lagoon.

By the time Rayburn passed through the opening in the coral reef, the sails of the schooner had disappeared from the horizon. He had a pocket compass which he always carried, but that was all. He swung the nose of the prau westward and headed full into the waning sun.

Only the terrible hatred that had been born within him could have made him undertake such a journey. The thought of the treacherous skipper filled him with a cold, icy rage, gave him a definite objective to keep his mind from the dangers he faced.

He dipped his hand over the side, laved his throbbing head with the cool sea water. Somehow he felt that the very desperation of his purpose would carry him through. He had only one haunting fear—that he would reach Tahiti too late, that Samoa Jack would dispose of the pearls and vanish somewhere into the wide reaches of the South Seas.

The blazing sun continued its downward course, sank at last in a blaze of multi-colored glory. For a while its reflection tinted a patch of fleecy clouds a brilliant rose color. Then the swift twilight of the tropics descended over the sea.

Rayburn ate sparingly of the feis, drank even more sparingly of the water in the calabash. The fair weather held. The matting sail bellied out in the breeze and the sharp prow of the canoe glided swiftly through the swelling waters.

The praus built by old Kariti's men were sturdy, designed for use in the open sea. Often his men made trips to neighboring atolls. If the weather continued as it was, Rayburn had no fear.

But squalls, waterspouts, hurricanes—come with appalling suddenness and devastating force in those latitudes. They would make matchwood of his frail craft in an instant. He could only breathe a silent prayer and hope that

the Fates would be kind.

The night seemed long, endless. He was as alone as if he were the only being in a vast universe of stars, deep azure sky and water. But the dawn came at last, lighting up the East in a riotous blaze of color. The sun gilded the crests of the waves, then climbed up into the heavens.

AT first, after the chill of the night, Rayburn welcomed its warm rays. Then, as it climbed higher, it beat down upon him with ever-increasing heat. His skin grew dry and hot, his mouth parched. The waters glinted back brassily with a steady glare that beat insistently at his eyeballs. He laved himself continuously from the water overside and only drank sparingly from his supply. Yet the contents of the calabash dropped ominously inch by inch. He took off his coat, wet it, wrung it out and covered the gourd to preserve his precious fluid from too rapid evaporation.

Several times the dark, triangular fin of a shark cut the surface of the sea, followed the progress of the prau a way in curiosity. Rayburn was relieved when the fin disappeared.

By noon the sun had turned the world to a baking inferno. Even the breeze came in hot, scorching puffs that only added to his discomfort. Rayburn began to mutter to himself in that silent, empty void of sea and sky. He muttered imprecations against Samoa Jack, against the blazing sun, against the Fates that had dangled this golden opportunity before his eyes, only to snatch it away again.

He lost all sense of time and space. Mechanically, like an automaton, he kept the prau to its course. But his mind became a seething, buzzing, aching torment.

He was hardly conscious of the fact that the day had passed until he shiv-

ered, started. After the blazing heat of the day the cool night wind struck him with a chill that penetrated every muscle. He finished the last of his food reluctantly, saw with dismay that the calabash was almost empty.

The need of sleep drugged his weary body. Yet he dared not relax. And each growing torment added fuel to the flames of his hate.

The stars came out, brilliant, clear, told him that he was on the right course. Then slowly their brilliance faded. The Milky Way paled, grew murky. Rayburn eyed it with a growing uneasiness. It was a bad sign.

The endless hours of the night wore on to another dawn. But a different dawn, this time. The breeze died down with the coming of the sun. And it was a brazen sun that climbed up out of the sea. Several times he saw birds, knew that he was nearing land. But they wheeled sharply and flew away before him, knowing the meaning of that brassy sun and breathless air.

Rayburn drained the last of his precious water supply, flung the useless calabash over the side. Despite the dryness of his throat, the sultry air brought great beads of sweat from his skin. He panted, found it difficult to breathe.

For a while the sea was smooth as a mill pond, glassy. The prau floated motionless on its surface. The heat brought the resin bubbling from the wood, broke the bubbles into blisters.

The calm broke with the suddenness and violence known only in the tropics. A gust of wind struck the matting sail of the prau, tore it loose and set it flapping like a great bird gone mad. The calm water whipped up into white froth, churned alongside at terrific speed as the canoe leaped forward. A deluge of rain poured from a suddenly darkened sky and in two minutes Rayburn was drenched to the skin.

How his frail craft, with its even frailer paddles and outrigger, survived the next five minutes, Rayburn himself never ceased to wonder. He fought with all his remaining strength, fought the elements that sought to tear him and the boat apart.

BUT somehow, by some miracle, he rode it out. The prau was swept up on the crest of high waves, then dropped with a sickening lurch into deep troughs. It was tossed about like a cockle shell by the running seas, heeled at perilous angles and steadied again.

Moments that seemed eternity. And a hundred times in each moment he felt that the end had come.

Yet it passed at last, swept on across the ocean. The deluge of rain ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The darkened sky gathered itself into a black mass that disappeared rapidly into the South and the tossing waves quieted down. Rayburn knew that he had been brushed by the very outmost fringes of a tropic squall and he did not care to think what would have happened had he been in its center.

The sun came out again—brilliant, burning, clear. It brought a haze of steam from his soaking clothes, warning ominously of another day that would be an inferno.

Rayburn was exhausted. His battle with the squall had taken the last ounce of strength from his tired body. His stomach was gnawed by the pangs of hunger. His throat was parched to leather dryness.

He saw that the current now was sweeping him in the right direction. He let it bear the prau along.

Time passed, endless hours. And at last, for the first time, he knew the black feeling of real despair. He had reached the end of his rope and he knew it.

For a long time he stared moodily, from slitted eyes, at the bottom of the

boat. Then at last he lifted his head and squinted his blood-shot eyes against the glare of the water. And he saw—a patch of green rise above the level of the sea, off to his right. He had almost, at the last moment, missed his objective!

Like a man in a daze, more dead than alive, he reached for the paddle at his feet. The matting sail had been torn to ribbons and it was utterly useless. With a strength he did not know he still possessed, he swung the prow of the boat around and headed for the island.

The magnificent peaks of La Diademe and Aorai rose up like beckoning beacons to urge him on. And at last the prau entered the harbor of Papeete.

The *Coral Queen*, badly battered, was tied up to the old cannon that served as bitts on the coral quay. Rayburn saw her tattered sails being furled and for a moment he could not believe his eyes. Then he knew the answer. The *Coral Queen* had been caught by the squall. A wild hope surged to his heart. Perhaps he was not too late!

KITTREDGE looked up as the door of his shop opened abruptly. A squat, straddle-legged man stood silhouetted for a moment on the threshold, then he stalked inside.

"Yes?" asked the jeweler inquiringly as the man approached him.

Samoa Jack fumbled inside his shirt. "Would you be interested in some pearls, Mister? Black ones—beauties."

Kittredge's eyebrows went up. He ran a hand down the side of his jaw. Rayburn had not returned. And when he did, there was no surety that he would bring back the pearls he had asked for, no surety that such pearls could be procured. He was interested—decidedly interested.

"I could find a market for them, perhaps," he said cautiously.

Samoa Jack produced a small packet,

carefully opened it on the counter. Four enormous, smoky pearls rolled out.

"What do you think of them, Mister?" he asked. "They ought to be worth plenty."

The gem dealer's eyes widened. He reached out, picked up a pearl, turned it over between thumb and forefinger. He looked closely at each one in turn and when he examined the last one—his eyes suddenly narrowed.

He looked for a long moment, searching, into the face of the man opposite him. Then, with a sudden decision, he reached for the revolver behind his counter.

But something in his searching scrutiny must have warned Samoa Jack. Even as his fingers closed about the butt of the revolver, the skipper flashed for his own. Kittredge stared down its black barrel.

"No, you don't, mister!"

Samoa Jack's free hand reached out, clamped like a vise about the old man's wrist. He brought the hand, still holding the gun, above the counter. Then his grip tightened slowly, inexorably. Kittredge winced with the pain. The feeling went out of his fingers and the revolver slipped loosely from them.

Samoa Jack released him suddenly. He scooped up the pearls, thrust them back into his pocket. His face twisted in an ugly scowl.

"I don't know what got the wind up you," he said hoarsely. "But you made a bad mistake when you reached for that cannon."

The gem dealer's face went ashen. "What—what are you going to do?"

The skipper laughed—a mocking, mirthless laugh. "I'm not going to walk out of here and let you call the police, if that's what you're thinking. No, Mister. I'm going to kill you!"

Kittredge saw his finger tighten on the trigger of his gun. He stared, paralyzed, unable to move or speak, down

the barrel of the weapon.

Then a voice spoke from the doorway—a hollow, croaking sound—a voice from the grave.

"No, you don't! You've got to settle with me—first!"

Samoa Jack whirled, spun about and looked at the doorway behind him. And what he saw there brought a screeching curse to his lips.

For there, framed in the open door, stood a wild, disheveled figure. Rayburn's clothes hung in shapeless folds about him. His bloodshot eyes gleamed with a mad light. His swollen lips made a blackened gash across his face.

Furniture toppled, crashed. The tiny shop became a shambles. And Death chattered at the two men as they struggled!

Club-fashion, the skipper swung the barrel of his gun at Rayburn's head. Rayburn rolled, felt cold steel gouge his cheek—then his shoulder shattered beneath the blow. A red film glazed his eyes. With a last desperate effort he threw a powerful right at Samoa Jack's chin—felt bone crumple beneath the blow.

Then the room was alive with gendarmes. But they weren't needed as far as Rayburn was concerned. For Samoa Jack was out cold, on the floor.

The leader of the gendarmes turned to Kittredge. "What ees it? What have happen' here?"

The gem dealer pointed a trembling finger at the prone skipper.

"This man is a robber. You will find pearls on him—stolen pearls. And I can prove they are stolen."

SAMOA JACK was hauled roughly to his feet, shaken back to consciousness. He struggled frantically, but his arms were pinioned by the gendarmes. He glared balefully at Rayburn.

"You can't get away with this, Mister. You—and him—" he indicated

Kittredge—"can't prove nothing."

Rayburn leaned against the table for support. His swollen lips twisted in a wry grimace.

"No? Well, listen to this. When you held me up, there on the trail, you took three pearls from me. Those were the ones I had just bought from old Kariti. Then another fell from my belt. That wasn't an accident. I made it drop—on purpose.

"You don't know pearls, or you wouldn't have been so greedy. That pearl was a fake one. Kittredge, here, gave it to me as a guide to the size and color of the pearls he wanted. I knew he'd recognize it again—know something had gone wrong. And he did."

Twin pulses beat at the sides of Samoa Jack's throat. His eyes glowed with a burning hate.

"Garn!" he retorted. "Suppose he did. You didn't know I'd come here. I could have taken the pearls to any other dealer—and got away with it."

Rayburn braced his knees. His strength was fast ebbing. "But I knew you'd come here, to this shop," he said grimly. "And I'll tell you why. When Kittredge gave me this commission, someone listened outside the window. I tangled with that man out in the alley outside. He got away from me, but he left the perfect print of his hand in the dust. And that print showed a long scar, running across his palm.

"When you reached out to take my pearls from me, skipper, I saw your hand. I recognized that scar and I remembered. You knew Kittredge was in the market for those pearls, knew he'd pay the best price for them. When I saw the *Coral Queen* tied up at the quay, I knew I'd find you here."

He turned to his interested audience.

"Someone do me a favor," he said. "Write out two tickets. One for me—first class—to Frisco. The other for Samoa Jack—ten years—to Noumea."

SNAKE WISDOM



by T. K. Hawley

THE sudden twilight of the East was falling upon the city. Jennings, my friend from the Foreign Office, and I sipped our stengahs on the broad verandah of the Hotel Metropole and watched the fading sun as it dipped low behind the house-tops of Calcutta. Below us, in the littered street, a motley crowd stopped to watch a Hindu snake charmer.

Cross-legged he squatted in the dust, his woven basket in front of him. The plaintive notes of a reed flute drifted to my ears—a monotonous, eerie wail. With fascinated eyes I watched the lid of the basket stir. It lifted slowly and a hideous, flat head slid into view. The reedy tones rose to a higher key and the ugly head weaved from side to side. Thus the reptile uncoiled and a length

of glistening black body slipped from the basket and moved sinuously through the dust toward the fakir. Involuntarily, I shuddered. I turned to look at Jennings' face and a quizzical smile twisted his lips.

"I suppose I'm squeamish," I said sheepishly. "I know a cobra is a common enough sight out here, but I'll admit I can't get used to them. They give me the—creeps."

The smile died from Jennings' face and he shook his head soberly.

"I don't blame you a bit," he said slowly. "I've lived in India a long time. I've seen cobras, hundreds of them. But there was one I'll never forget. If you had more time I would tell you about it."

I looked at my watch.

"An hour before dinner time. Go ahead, old man, I'd like to hear the story."

Jennings signalled the boy for another round. He waited meditatively until the tall frosted glasses were set on the table, then lifted his and gazed unseeingly at the sparkling amber liquid. Then he began:

It was two years ago, while wasting a good bit of His Majesty's time down Burma way in trying to get some senseless data on a new native disease, that I received an urgent summons from my chief to return here to Calcutta. The message didn't come as a surprise. Not at all. For a long time, ugly rumors had been drifting down to me from the hill country. Nothing definite, you know, just vague rumors of native unrest. But the news disturbed me. I had a premonition. You will get that way, my boy, when you have been in India as long as I. For days I had waited, sticking close to my hotel, for the summons I knew would come.

It came. It was terse, profane, and to the point. That was Old Man Dawson's way. I was all ready for it and two days later, the Old Man had the pleasure of swearing at me in person across his desk, instead of trusting his fiery expletives to a none-too-certain post. I noticed at once that his lean, tanned face was drawn and haggard, and his voice nervous and jerky as he greeted me.

"Sit down, Jennings," he said without any preliminaries. "Smoke?"

I helped myself to a generous handful of Gold Flakes, lit one and waited. Dawson got right down to business.

"There's a devil's mess brewing up in the hills," he snapped. "And we've got to put a stop to it."

"I've heard things," I admitted. "Just rumors in the bazaars. What's up?"

The Old Man snorted.

"A renegade white man, of course," he said. "Gold-crazy. Looting shrines."

"Bad business—especially for a white man," I replied.

"It's dynamite," snapped my chief. "Why must these idiots poke a finger into other people's religions? I tell you, Jennings, if this matter gets any worse we'll have a wholesale massacre on our hands. You've got to get this man, understand?"

It sounded to me like a pretty tough assignment, but I didn't dare to say so. Dawson was like that. He had been a major in the army and when he gave an order—well, that was all there was to it.

"YOU will proceed to Chandapore immediately," he went on. "I can tell you very little, except that the marauder is of slight build and dark complexion. Calls himself the Cobra, and acts like one. That's all I know."

Little enough to go on, I thought, as I rose to go. Dawson called to me as I reached the door.

"I say, old man," he added. "The Rajah's summer palace is about twelve kilometers outside of Chandapore. Ghadkari Singh is a friend of the British Raj, so he says. See him. He may be able to give you some information."

"I'll do my best, sir," I promised.

Dawson's only reply was a noncommittal grunt.

I hurried back to my hotel, threw a few essentials into my kit and started off on the trail of the mysterious Cobra.

I'll pass over the train trip. You know what that was like—stifling heat, flies, carriages jammed to overflowing with a motley crowd of perspiring natives. The heat was the worst of all. When I stepped onto the platform at Chandapore, it rose in shimmering waves from the dusty street and every breath was an effort.

The Chief had given me a sweet job, sending me to that hell-hole at the

height of the hot season. And, to make matters worse, the natives were sullen and antagonistic to white men. Usually, on arriving, a swarm of the beggars would be crowding about me, squabbling over the privilege of carrying my kit. But when I dumped my luggage on the platform of Chandapore, I found myself left strictly to my own devices. A group of tattered porters, huddled in a corner, broke up as I approached them and shambled off muttering to each other.

I was in a quandary. To tote my bag to the hotel would mean losing caste. It simply isn't done, you know. I finally collared the station master—a half caste evidently proud of his white blood—and left my kit to his doubtful care. Then I made tracks for the nearest cafe, to wash the dust of the trip away with a couple of whiskeys-straight.

All the way to the ramshackle hotel, the only one the town boasted, I noticed the same hostility of the natives. Shopkeepers peered out of their dark, smelly, little cubby-holes as I passed and the looks they threw me weren't exactly what you'd call friendly. Even the dirty children, playing in the rubbish-littered streets, called out after me in derision. If I could have understood their shrill taunts, I should probably have wrung the little beggars' necks.

By the time I arrived at the hotel, I was hot under the collar. I strode into the bar with a chip on my shoulder and I must have looked mighty belligerent, for the crowd about the doorway moved aside to let me pass.

In one corner of the small room, a white man sat alone at a table. He hailed me and I promptly plumped myself into the seat beside him. He wasted no time, but pounded a tanned fist on the bamboo table and bellowed for more drinks. Then he turned to look at me.

"What brings you to this hell-hole?"

he asked abruptly. "Chandapore is the most God-forsaken spot in all the East, believe me."

I poured out a good four fingers of Scotch before I answered.

"Foreign Office. The name's Jennings," I introduced myself. "You're an American, aren't you?"

"Yeah. I'm Armer—American Lumber Export," he replied. "Shake."

I clasped his proffered hand and was amazed at the latent strength in his lean, bronzed fingers. I liked his level gray eyes with their penetrating look. The kind of a man you'd like to have beside you in a scrap, you know.

"I'll be glad to shake the dust of Chandapore off my feet," Armer said. "Something's got the wind up the natives in this town, all right. They're a villainous-looking crew and they don't fancy strangers none, either."

"So you noticed it, too," I said.

"A BLIND man could guess something's up," he answered. "Well, I should worry over these flea-bitten beggars. I'm going to visit the Rajah."

"You're going to the Palace?" I asked eagerly.

"Yeah. His Nibs owns forests of valuable trees. A young fortune in teak, but he can't get it out. I'm up here to see if there's any way of cutting and shipping the stuff."

"I'm on my way to visit His Highness, myself," I said.

Armer slapped his fist on the creaking table.

"Great. You're going with me. Come on, we might as well get started."

He paid the chit, flung a handful of coins at the boy and we started off. Armer led the way down the narrow alley that weaved its way past the side of the hotel. He stopped before a battered, ancient Ford and surveyed the relic with evident pride.

"Good old Lizzie," he said fondly.

"She may not be so hot to look at, Jennings, but she gets me wherever I want to go. Hop in."

I suppressed a smile as I climbed into the tattered front seat. Armer rummaged around in the rear, got out a crank and rolled up his sleeves. His powerful shoulder muscles bulged with the effort as he heaved on the crank. Lizzie's engine caught, leaped into life and started to shimmy. I thought the whole car would fall apart, but it must have been her usual performance. Armer climbed in beside me and grinned cheerfully.

"Where away?" he asked.

"My kit is down at the station," I replied.

"The station it is," he agreed.

With a back-fire that sounded like a bombardment in the narrow alley, Lizzie chugged her way through the dust. I held on firmly to the side of the juggling car and breathed a silent prayer that I would arrive at the Palace in one piece.

THE Rajah received me with a solemn, formal politeness. In his youth, Ghadkari Singh had attained great renown as a warrior. Now, in his age, he still held his head high and his shoulders erect, the true scion of a noble Rajput ancestry. He listened attentively as I explained my mission. A jeweled hand stroked his beard and his head bowed as though beneath the weight of his glittering turban.

"Aye, *Sahib*," he said at last. "My poor people have suffered much at the hands of this renegade. He is a Cobra, indeed. He strikes in the dark without warning and leaves a trail of death and horror in his wake."

"Has anyone seen this man?" I asked. "How shall I know him?"

"Many have seen him, *Sahib*," answered the Rajah. "He is slight and dark, quick to anger and quick to slay

His eyes, like the snake for which he is named, are black, but glow red with fury when he is angered. His lair is in the hills. Where—no one knows."

"He works alone?" I asked.

His Highness nodded.

"Strange that no one has killed him before this," I commented.

"Many have tried," he replied. "But they have failed. He seems invulnerable. Nay, he boasts even, that nothing can stand before the Cobra and live."

I rose to take my departure. "I'll get him, never fear," I promised. But I would have been glad if I had had half the assurance of my boasting words.

Ghadkari Singh stroked his beard thoughtfully and shook his head dubiously at my rash statement. "My people grow restless," he warned. "Another outrage may break the bonds of submission and I fear I myself shall be unable to hold them."

I recognized the unspoken threat underlying the Rajah's words. And I didn't feel any too good. I could expect no help from this quarter; I had to do the job single-handed. If I failed, my own life and the lives of every white man in the country wouldn't be worth a farthing. Nice prospect!

"Have you any idea where the Cobra might strike next?" I asked. "Is there any place that would be particularly tempting to his greed?"

"On the outskirts of Chandapore stands the Great Temple of Siva," answered the Rajah. "Hindu priests guard the temple. But there is a hidden shrine there, known only to the priests themselves. In that shrine stands an image of the god himself, solid gold, decked with jewels worth a king's ransom."

A low whistle escaped my lips.

"None but the priests know the way to the shrine," continued the Rajah.

"Many a marauder has sought the sacred idol, but the vengeance of the god has fallen upon him. Not one has come back alive."

"But the Cobra might try it, anyway," I said. "He claims he's invulnerable, doesn't he?"

Ghadkari Singh rose to his full height. His eyes flashed fire. "*Sahib*, be warned!" His deep voice boomed in my ears like some awful prophecy of doom. "If the Sacred Shrine of Siva be despoiled, every *ferenghi* in India shall be slain."

That was enough for me. I bade His Highness a hasty goodbye and fairly fled.

In the wide, luxurious entrance hall to the Palace I almost bumped into Armer. I must have looked mighty worried, for he grasped my arm and peered curiously into my face.

"I'm heading back to Chandapore," I said hurriedly, before he could ask any questions. "Look me up when you get back from your forest trek."

I left him standing there, gazing wonderingly at my hurriedly retreating form.

ARMER rambled off in his Ford that afternoon and I was left alone in that infernal pest-hole of Chandapore with a incipient rebellion on my hands. The old Rajah had been decent and civil enough, but I didn't like the veiled threats and insinuations in his voice. Not that I blamed him much. A bandit is a bandit and a shrine, no matter of what faith, should be sacred.

I sweated away in that flea-bitten town for a week—and I accomplished just nothing. What was there for me to do? What could I do? By Jove, it was damnably uncomfortable. On all sides of me were signs of trouble—ugly trouble. It was more than the usual undercurrent of unrest that we have to meet in a year of poor crops or when

the Government sees fit to imprison one of the native liberators. These children out here will stand an awful lot of crowding until you begin poking an alien finger into their religion.

And here was this marauder, this renegade white, the evil-fanged Cobra as he was pleased to call himself, not only desecrating the temples with his white shadow, but ravaging them. I tell you I began to sweat and it wasn't from the heat either. It would have been simple if it had been only a matter of confronting the Cobra with his infamy and arresting him—killing him, even. Yes, I had shot a man before that with much less provocation. But this white snake saw to it that the problem was not reduced to such simple fundamentals.

As I have said, Ghadkari Singh could only vaguely tell me where I might find this elusive bandit. He pointed vaguely to the northland as his nest of evil. He was a white man and vicious. He had not only violated the law of the land, but the sanctity of the all-embracing temple. The former could be forgiven, but the gods demanded retribution!

A ticklish situation, you'll grant me. It was a job more for a company of Tommies than for a lone operative attached to the Foreign Office. But plainly I had to act, if for no other reason than to save my own hide. Save it—not from the wrath of the Cobra, but from the ever-growing menace of the natives themselves.

For five blistering days of scorching heat and torrid sun I waited for the Cobra to come to me. He didn't. There was nothing left for me to do but to go to him. On the sixth day of inactivity I let it be known with a fanfare of loud talk and pompous promises, that on the morrow I was setting out alone for the hills that hemmed the town in search of the Cobra. This announce-

ment met with sullen silence from the natives. By Jove, those blighters thought I was in league with the villain of their little melodrama.

I was having a final night-cap of whiskey and soda in the bar that night—I needed it—when the massive frame of Armer, teak man, lumbered through the door. I tell you I was never so glad to see anyone before. Armer radiated that hearty health and assurance that made him impervious to disease or bullets. He greeted me boisterously in his booming bass voice.

"Hello, Jennings," he called out as he pounded down to my table. "What's all this I hear about you attacking the Cobra at dawn?"

That passed with Armer for a laugh, but I was too glad to see him to quarrel with his humor.

"Well, not exactly that," I said.

"But you're going?" insisted Armer. "Alone?"

"Yes—alone."

"That's where you're wrong, old man," he boomed, pounding me affectionately on the back until I choked over my drink. "What's the matter with me going with you? I haven't a blessed thing to do for three days and I'd rather face your snaky friend than stay in this hotbox of a hotel."

I made no pretense at denying how glad I'd be at having him along. I felt better after that. Armer, I judged, would be a handy man in an emergency and my estimate was later proved correct. We had another whiskey and soda together in the bar, while we discussed our plans for the following day. Then we separated for the night.

THE rising sun next day found Armer and me holding to the sides of the decrepit Ford, heading north along the dusty road that led out of Chandapore. I had two heavy Webleys strapped to my waist and enough ammunition to

supply a squad of soldiers. Armer contented himself as far as armament went with a Smith and Wesson .38.

"I'd sooner crash my fist into this guy's jaw than shoot him," was his way of putting it.

We rattled steadily on towards Darhabad, pushing the tin contraption for all she was worth. We arrived there about eleven. From all reports and from all evidence that I could gather of the Cobra's raids, his headquarters were somewhere in the vicinity. If you know that territory you will realize that it was ideally suited to his needs. Heavy, rank jungle outcropping over a curious rock formation that was honeycombed with caves.

The natives of Darhabad must have seen us coming, for when we pulled up before the one musty cafe on the straggling main street, no one was in sight. Inside the bar, Armer prodded the houseboy from the hole in which he had hidden himself at our coming. He surveyed us sullenly.

"We are looking for the white man who calls himself the Cobra," I said without mincing words or sparring for opportunity.

The boy—who was not a boy at all, but a wizened old man—looked at us with suspicious eyes. "Is *Sahib* a friend of the Cobra?" he asked.

"Don't be a damn fool," Armer exploded. "Of course not." He patted his gun holster significantly. "We're looking for that snake to kill him."

A light of understanding dawned in the houseboy's eyes. "You are not friends with the Cobra? You seek him—to kill him?"

"Yes," I said. "I understand that he hides out near here."

"Aye, *Sahib*, you speak the truth. He has looted the village of all that is of value. There is nothing more for him, so he leaves us in peace. But if you seek him out, bear to the east. Up

the ravine lays your course. You will find a jungle shrine there. It is defiled now and sacred only to the Cobra."

Armer and I downed our drinks with all despatch. This was the first direct tip I had received concerning the Cobra and I was anxious to test it out. If I could fulfill my mission that day, with my bullets between the bandit's eyes, so much the better. I had frankly given up the idea of taking him alive. If the truth were known, my chief interest lay in putting him out of the way.

Further inquiry of the houseboy convinced us that even Armer's gallant Ford would not be able to negotiate the ravine trail. We parked it behind the cafe and ploughed afoot through the six-inch coating of dust on the road.

Giving off from the village on our right was a plainly marked path that climbed steadily upward toward some notched hills that reared their peaks from a distance of ten kilometers. The going was comparatively easy the first kilometer, but from then on the grade became steeper and the path strewn with heavy, half-ton boulders. I noted that in reality we were climbing up the bed of some ancient stream.

It was high noon by now. The sun and the heat were terrific, to say nothing of the myriad flies and insects that attacked us in swarms. Difficult as the going was, we decided to push on at least as far as the jungle shrine, which the houseboy had told us marked the beginning of the Cobra's domain.

It was tough going. We toiled. We sweated. We panted. A hundred times I cursed spitefully, for loading myself down with the two revolvers and the surplus rounds of ammunition. I was for calling a halt at the height of the heat, but Armer, with his long legs working like pistons, urged me on. I really believe the man enjoyed the thrill of it and was totally oblivious to the discomfort of heat and insects. He was

on a man-hunt and his eyes shone with a fanatical fire that wasn't at all usual with him.

WE traversed the last half kilometer of that rocky river bed on hands and knees. Not easy going when you consider that the thermometer registered a hundred and ten. We were rewarded, however, at the top of the course by coming out on a flat plateau with heavy jungle crowding in from all sides.

There was a clean-cut lane through the miasmic foliage, through which the sun filtered like a curtain of flame. But Armer and I had altogether forgotten the heat just then; forgotten the long, arduous climb behind us. For at the far end of the shaft of light, cutting through the jungle like a sword stroke, stood the shrine.

It was a large affair as those things go, with two grotesque, grinning gods ornamenting each corner. Armer and I broke into a dog trot at the same instant. The labor of the gruelling ascent had been such that suddenly that God-forsaken, pagan shrine assumed tremendous importance to us as a long-sought-after goal, reached only after aeons of struggle.

We were so eager to investigate its mystery—if it harbored any—that I swear neither Armer nor I once thought of the possible danger it might shelter as well. That was a serious lapse of sanity for a Foreign Office man, especially since we had been forewarned that this isolated shrine was the special signpost of the Cobra.

I had a little the best of it with Armer on level ground—he weighed a full fifteen stone—and was the first to reach the shrine. He was a panting second behind me.

On closer inspection, the sanctuary proved to be the usual thing, save that a small, two-foot square aperture had

been cut in the middle of its base. You know, it reminded me of nothing so much as a post office letter chute, and I was quick to note that to that identical end someone had made use of it.

Set in the shallow niche was a small box about eighteen inches square. Reposing directly in the center of it was a letter. That fact alone was strange. What was more exceptional still, was the fact that the letter was addressed to me!

I reached out for it eagerly. Here was mystery—intrigue! I had neither eyes nor ears for anything else. The letter came away in my fingers, but it carried along with it the lid of the box on which it had reposed. The next second I was staring with fascinated eyes at the ugly, flat head of a cobra, which had reared out of the box as I took the lid away.

It swayed sinisterly from side to side, ready to strike, and such was the menace of its evil eyes that I was actually hypnotized into inactivity. I tell you, man, I was utterly helpless; utterly powerless to move away from the evil death about to strike me.

The roar of Armer's .38 at the side of my ear snapped me out of my trance. I recoiled with the explosion of the gun, a fraction of a second before the snake struck once convulsively forward. It pitched headlong to the ground before the shrine and writhed there. Armer's gun crashed out twice again, blowing off the reptile's head. That man was a crack shot with his .38.

Well, I can tell you there was a ring of sweat under my sun helmet when Armer turned to me after finally dispatching the snake. He grinned at me irritatingly. I'll be damned if I saw anything funny in the situation, then or now.

"Close," said Armer. "The more I see and hear of this Cobra, the more I respect him. Not being able to greet us

in person, he delegated his emissary for that honor."

I swallowed hard, wiped my brow and got a grip on myself. "Too damn close," I breathed. "Thanks, old man, for the marksmanship."

"Say," said Armer, "what's that in your hand?"

At his words I looked down at the member in question and saw that I was still clutching the letter with the lid of the box attached to it. In the excitement I had completely forgotten it, though I still held fast to it, automatically.

Armer stepped up and we examined the contrivance. It was simple enough. The envelope had been attached to the lid of the box with some aromatic gum. When I picked up the letter, the lid came away with it and not only the lid, but the cobra also.

THAT infernal devil had set as diabolical a plot as conceivable for me. Somehow or other he had gotten wind of my expedition and either knew or saw to it that I took the path up the ravine to the shrine. The rest was simple enough. He knew that no white man, no matter how cautious, can resist opening a letter addressed to him. Of course he had planted the cobra there for me.

It was because of Armer's impatient urging that I at last inserted my finger under the seal of the letter and opened it. It read something like this, as well as I can recollect:

Douglas Jennings, Esq.

Just to warn you that if the cobra I am leaving to greet you does not do his job well—I will. Let me warn you again that nothing can stand before The Cobra.

Something just as insolent as that. Oh, yes, it was signed—signed with a

crude representation of the snake after which he chose to model himself.

Well, that letter aroused Armer's fighting blood. Good man, Armer. Between us in the next two days we scoured those rocky hills for miles around, but all to no avail. Not one sign, not one sound did we get from the Cobra. And good reason for it, too. When we finally got back to Chandapore, the town was in a ferment over the latest outrage perpetrated by that fiend of hell.

My predicament was worse than it had been before. The situation was rapidly getting out of hand. And to make matters worse, Armer had to return to his company office in Singapore. I was left to my own devices and decided to investigate the Great Temple of Siva.

There I questioned the Hindu priests and learned more about the fabulous Sacred Shrine. No layman had ever laid eyes upon the golden god and the very way to the hidden sanctuary was a jealously guarded secret. Guarded not alone by the devices of man, but by the wrath and vengeance of the god himself.

I racked my brains in an effort to devise a plan, some scheme by which I could lay my hands on my elusive quarry. For I felt sure that sooner or later, his cunning caution would be overcome by his greed to loot this last inviolate sanctuary. For the next two days I communed with the bottle in silence, seeking inspiration, but none came. Had Old Man Dawson seen me then, he would have hit the ceiling.

The third night found me at my table in the corner of the bar. I missed Armer and felt strangely alone. The little cafe was rank with tobacco smoke and I decided to go for a walk to clear my lungs as well as my head. I shifted my Webley around to a convenient notch on my belt as I stepped out into the gloomy street.

While the natives had not attacked me as yet, I knew it wasn't exactly healthy to prowls about the narrow, crooked alleys of Chandapore on a dark night. And believe me, it was a dark night. There was no moon and only the fitful flare of an occasional lamp in some hovel cast a feeble patch of light into the gloom. But the night air was grateful to my smoke-filled lungs and I wandered aimlessly along.

Everything seemed quiet. Only the shrill yappings of the mongrel pack of dogs that raced about the town broke the stillness. Yet something made me cautious. I turned a corner and darted a swift glance down the street that opened up before me. It was deserted. About ten feet ahead, a brilliant shaft of light splashed across the inky blackness. It emanated from the wide-slatted jalousies of a carved window up above, and made a sparkling rectangle in the dusty roadway in my path. I strolled on and just as I emerged into the dazzling glare, it happened.

The razor-sharp point of a knife jabbed into my spine and a sibilant warning sounded in my ear.

"Put up your hands!" hissed a voice—in English!

MY arms shot above my head mechanically and I guess my mouth gaped foolishly in surprise. Then the point of the dagger scraped across my shirt and a small, dark figure slipped around to confront me. I blinked at the shining blade as it came to rest directly over my pounding heart. My spell-bound gaze followed the thin, sinewy arm that held the murderous weapon and fastened on a small, hooded figure draped in dark robes. The hood slipped a bit to one side and the brilliant illumination from behind the jalousies lit up the man's face.

There was no mistaking those eyes. Beady, glittering sparks of jet. Even

as I watched, fascinated, they clouded over and glowed a dull, sinister red. While I had waited and schemed, the Cobra had come—for me. I cursed myself inwardly for a blundering idiot. The Cobra must have read my thoughts.

"Ah, Jennings," he purred. "Why blame yourself for your stupidity? All the police are stupid. So the Foreign Office would match wits with the Cobra? Ha! That is laughable, really."

A quick retort rose to my lips at the taunt and I must have made an angry movement, for the sharp point of the dagger prodded me in warning. To move was suicide and I started to talk, tried to find a vulnerable spot in the renegade's armour of self-assurance.

"The Foreign Office doesn't fear you," I said. "To them, you are just another bandit."

He spat. "Bah—no one can stand before the Cobra and live," he boasted. "As for the stupid police . . ."

"So you've run afoul of the police before, eh?" I sneered. "Perhaps some London bobby ran you in for snatching old ladies' purses in Whitechapel?"

The chance shot told—and his eyes reddened with fury.

"I'm no common thief," he hissed. "My ancestors were gentlemen when yours were slaves."

"And ended up on the gallows, I suppose," I jeered.

"You fool," he grated. His voice was stiffened with wounded pride. "My father . . ."

He straightened up unconsciously in his arrogance. It was my chance and I seized it. My left hand shot up and grasped the sinewy wrist that held the knife, while my right reached for the Webley in my belt. But before I could get my gun into action, the Cobra flung himself upon me.

We crashed heavily into the dust, rolling over and over, seeking a death hold. He was slippery as an eel and

his writhing body in its loose robes afforded me no chance for a tight grip. I clung to his wrist with all my strength and fought desperately to keep the deadly blade from plunging into my body.

High-pitched, feminine screams shrilled out from the balcony above and I heard the sounds of pattering feet converging in our direction. But my grip was weakening and the murderous dagger bore slowly down. A low, sibilant curse escaped the Cobra's lips as the sound of hurrying footsteps drew nearer. He struck with all the venom of a snake.

I twisted my head sharply to one side and the razor-sharp steel burned its way across my forehead. A warm stream of blood poured down my face. Then suddenly I was free. Like a shadow of evil, the dark, hooded figure had disappeared in the deeper shadows of the night.

Pursuit was futile, for the Cobra had melted away like a wraith. I rose slowly from the dust, ran an exploring hand over my bleeding forehead and turned to face the crowd that gathered swiftly upon the scene. A native proffered a dirty rag as a bandage, but I refused it. Instead I drew a clean handkerchief from my pocket and bound it around the wound.

I stayed their shrill questions with a raised hand. I explained the incident to the crowd and at the mention of the Cobra, they began to jabber excitedly among themselves. I saw several cast anxious glances into the surrounding gloom and draw closer into the huddled circle. The mere fact that I had faced the Cobra—and lived—was not enough. I had not come away from the encounter unscathed and they reminded me of my boast to rid them of the reign of terror that had fallen upon them.

STILL jabbering and gesticulating, the crowd escorted me back to the

hotel. I must have looked a sorry sight and I could hardly blame them for looking dubious at my oft-repeated promises.

I went to bed that night with a throbbing head and a firm resolve to capture the Cobra on the morrow. How, I did not know, and my poor head was incapable of any clever plan. I had a vague notion of trailing him through the hills and the jungle, of tracking him down by sheer perseverance.

I was rudely awakened from a nightmare in which I was surrounded by hundreds of baleful, reptilian eyes, by the houseboy of the hotel. A brilliant beam of sunlight filtered through the cracks in the shutters of my room and made a barred pattern on my bed.

The boy thrust an envelope at me. On its white surface, a familiar, bold script leaped up at my startled gaze. A message from the Cobra! The boy gazed curiously at me as I tore the envelope open with trembling fingers. I quickly extracted a folded sheet of paper and began to read:

Douglas Jennings, Esq.:

I have long boasted that nothing can stand before the Cobra. Yet last night we met and you are still alive. If you fear me, leave Chandapore at once. If you do not, I shall be waiting for you in the shrine at Darhabad. The Cobra.

I leaped from the bed as the note dropped unheeded to the floor. The Cobra had come out into the open at last. This was more to my liking—a straightforward battle and may the best man win.

I splashed some cold water on my face from the tin basin and fairly threw on my clothes in my hurry to get going. It might be a trap, I reflected, as I snatched a hasty breakfast. I would have to keep a sharp lookout as I ap-

proached his lair. But once let me meet him face to face! I ran a tender finger over my bandaged head and the thought of vengeance was sweet.

I scoured the town in search of a mule to carry me to Darhabad and finally purchased a mangy-looking old beast from an Afghan trade. It was a sorry animal and not worth half the price the shrewd rascal demanded. But I had no time to waste in haggling and I poured a flood of coins into his outstretched claw of a hand.

I had laughed at Armer's Ford, but Lizzie would have looked like the Vice-roy's limousine to me just then. All the long miles of dusty road, I prodded my poor beast unmercifully. I cursed him. I coaxed him. I beat a tattoo on his skinny ribs with my heels. The journey seemed endless and the blazing noon-day sun was scorching my back as I finally paraded up the main street of Darhabad.

I left the mule tethered to a tall mohor that shaded the village tank. I had not forgotten that uphill climb to the shrine of the Cobra. But the clattering of a mule's hoofs up that rocky ravine would have advertised my coming to the man who awaited me. There was nothing else to do, so I set out on foot.

The further I progressed, toiling painfully along under the blistering sun, the more I became convinced that a carefully-planned trap awaited me. I saw myself standing before Ghadkari Singh and remembered his words: "The Cobra strikes in the dark, without warning." I began to see a hidden menace in every tree, to look suspiciously at every boulder. By the time I arrived at the top of the rise that led to the shrine, my every nerve was tense, strained. I crouched low behind a huge outcropping of rock and peered cautiously down the lane of trees that lined the path. The obscene, grinning gods that framed the doorway of the shrine seemed to leer at me. All

was quiet. Ominously quiet.

Gun in hand, I began a cautious, painfully slow approach. I crawled forward for what seemed to me hours. My tongue grew parched and swollen from the heat and swarms of insects buzzed angrily at my intrusion. Still that awful quiet. Not a sound broke that terrible stillness.

THE interior of the shrine looked deserted as I reached the open doorway. The prolonged silence had unnerved me, but I pulled myself together. I crossed the threshold in one bound and landed inside, my finger tense on the trigger of my gun.

But the place was empty. I poked about, looking for some sign or message, but there was none. Then I leaned against a carved pillar and did some tall thinking.

It came to me like a flash. The Temple of Siva! I had fallen for an obvious trick. I had swallowed the bait—hook, line and sinker—and come hot-footing it up into the hills while the Cobra made a raid many kilometers away! How he must be gloating at my blundering stupidity. Even a schoolboy should have seen through the flimsy ruse.

I tell you I was sore. I only hoped and prayed that it might not be too late to make up for my foolish blunder. I tore down that scorching gully as fast as my legs could carry me. Perspiration poured in little rivulets down my back and the weight of my Webley grew at every stride. I thought of the sorry mule beside the village tank, my only possible means of transportation back to Chandapore, and I swore.

That ride was a nightmare. The road seemed endless. The heat was terrific and my head throbbed painfully. Every jolt seemed to send needle-thrusts of pain shooting through me, yet I drove my tired beast to the limit of his endurance.

The shadows of the mohors lengthened in the slanting rays of the sun as I neared the gates of Chandapore. I spurred the mule on to a last effort. Suddenly I noticed a turbaned figure running up the road to meet me. I pulled the mule up short and waited.

The newcomer was a young lad, a mere boy, and he panted heavily as he reached my side. "*Sahib!*" he gasped. "The Cobra!"

I swung down from the saddle and grasped his arm. "Where?"

The boy poured forth a rapid flood of dialect. "He has killed the priests, *Sahib*, and he goes to steal the god!"

I waited for no more, but flung the reins at the lad and plunged into the trees in the direction of the temple. I pounded on, till every breath was torture. When I thought my lungs must burst from the strain, I emerged into a clearing. There, its pagoda roof rising high above the surrounding trees, loomed the Great Temple of Siva.

I crossed the clearing at top speed, bounded up the steps and plunged into the temple. I was met with a scene of horror. Immense carved images of the Hindu Triad gazed down, unseeing, at the crumpled bodies of the priests at their feet. The Cobra had struck again.

"*Nothing can stand before the Cobra!*"

The taunt rang in my ears as I stopped beside the nearest prone figure. I turned the Hindu over and he stirred feebly. I lifted him to a sitting position and he slowly opened his eyes.

"The Cobra—where is he?" I asked.

The dying man's eyes turned to mine. "Gone—gone to the Sacred Shrine. He seeks the golden image of Siva." He coughed and a patch of crimson stained his lips.

"Where is this Sacred Shrine?" I demanded.

But the priest's eyes glazed and a film dimmed them. "The vengeance of the

god shall fall upon him," he mumbled. "He shall . . ." His words were choked off in a gurgle as the warm blood welled up in his throat.

He went limp in my arms and I gently lowered him to the floor. For the first time I noticed the strange garments he wore—a sort of heavy red tunic above high leggings of stout leather—but my mind was too busy to pay much attention to such details. I rose from my knees and as I stood up, a shrill yell of triumph drifted to my ears. I galvanized into life. I could feel the blood pounding in my temples at the familiar voice. The Cobra!

The sound seemed to come from my right and drawing my Webley, I ran in that direction. It was then I noticed for the first time a small aperture in the wall of the temple. The entrance to a subterranean tunnel—the way to the Sacred Shrine.

The gaping mouth of the passageway led down into Stygian darkness. The walls felt dark, moist, as I groped my way down a sharp decline in a blackness so thick it seemed tangible, alive. It was horrible. A subtle threat of death lived in the air. A clammy perspiration broke out on my hands and face. My lungs suffocated with an oppressive weight. I clenched my teeth; jammed the Webley on ahead of me and stumbled on.

Suddenly a ray of light glimmered ahead of me. I stopped abruptly, crouched low and peered into the Sacred Shrine itself.

FLICKERING torches set into the rocky walls of the cavern lit up the great idol set at the far end, with a weird, unholy glow. I gasped at the sight. That ugly, squatting shape was cast in solid gold—studded with priceless gems. And at its base stood the Cobra, gazing up at the fabulous image as though in a hypnotic trance.

For some utterly perverse reason I tried to calculate its approximate value in pounds, but the resultant figure made me dizzy. As I stood there stupidly, stunned by the magnificence before me, the Cobra stretched out a grasping hand.

Then suddenly a rustling sound came to me. It came from under my feet, from over my head—it was everywhere in the hollow cavern at once. I listened intently. It swelled in volume. But the Cobra stood transfixed, unhearing, unseeing, oblivious of everything but the glittering image before him.

The rustling grew louder, like the shifting sands of the desert; rose and fell like a thousand tongues of the sea sucking at a rocky shore. I could not place its origin. It was there, everywhere. It engulfed me. An eerie chill raced down my spine.

Then, before my horrified gaze, a flat wicked head protruded from the rocky wall of the cavern. Then another—and another—and another. Good God! There was a sea of writhing cobra heads weaving down on the shrine—converging down on the shrine and the white man before it.

I tell you I was paralyzed—rooted to the very ground by the horrific spectacle. I was in some phantasmagoric trance. Then sanity returned. I tried to shout, but though my lips opened—no sound came. The awful reptiles weaved across the floor of the cavern like a hissing sea, toward the defiler of their shrine. There must have been hundreds of them.

My voice returned at last. A shrill cry emanated from my lips.

The Cobra whirled. Then took a frantic step backward. I can still see the look of horror that fastened on his face. God! It was awful. He screamed, a high-pitched wail of terror, then threw up his hands as the cobras struck.

Somehow that abandoned cry broke the invisible bonds that held me. I turned, ran blindly, panic-stricken, stumbling, back through that dark, dank passageway. I wanted to get away, anywhere away from that sea of writhing, leaping, striking serpents.

I can't describe my feelings as I clawed my way up that slimy, gruesome tunnel. It was a hideous nightmare, unreal, unbelievable. Finally I emerged, breathless, into the temple proper. My unreasonable terror abated, my brain cleared. And as I stumbled hurriedly over the prone bodies of the slain priests, I noticed again their curious leather garments. I knew then what they were for—a protection against those hideous guardians of the inner shrine.

No—I didn't stop to examine them. I wanted sunshine then. Air—and the open sky above my head.

JENNINGS reached for the bottle on the table, poured himself a stiff drink and gulped it down. "You know, old man," he said slowly, "I often think of that depraved bandit's boast. 'Nothing can stand before the Cobra—and live.' And he was right, for that very reptile proved his own doom."

I shook myself, as though to cast off the spell of his strange tale. I reached for my watch, but as I did, a shadow fell across the table.

"Humph, so here you sit, Jennings, dilly-dallying over a drink," said a brusque voice.

I looked up to see a pompous, middle-aged man, with a distinctly military bearing.

"I beg your pardon, Chief," said Jennings quickly. He mumbled a hasty

introduction. I gazed curiously at his chief—Old Man Dawson, as Jennings had called him.

The Major snorted. "Humph, while you've been swilling stengahs, I've been combing Calcutta for you." He fumbled about in his waistcoat pocket. "I've a job for you, Jennings. The Earl of Bentringham is seeking his long-lost son. A good-for-nothing young helion, kicked out of his family to make a name for himself. You know the story."

He fished out an envelope, extracted a photograph and passed it over to Jennings. My friend studied it a moment and a strange expression crossed his face.

"So this is the son of the Earl of Bentringham," he said in a curious, strained tone.

I had a vision of the Earl as I had once seen him. A tall, stern man, but just and honest. He had held his gray head high, proud of his noble ancestry, conscious of having upheld the traditions of his forefathers. A true gentleman of the old school.

"I hope for the Earl's sake that the son came through," said Dawson. "The old man was a bit of the right stuff."

Jennings passed the photograph to me with a shudder. "I'm sorry, sir," he said slowly. "But the boy is dead. He died up in the hills—of snake bite."

I looked at the handsome, yet evil, features that stared up at me from the picture. Dark, bold eyes that reminded me of something. They were hypnotic, those eyes, almost reptilian in their unblinking stare.

I shot a quick glance at Jennings. His eyes met mine across the table—and I understood.

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Thanks are also extended this issue to Collectors Kenneth Johnson and Bernard Drew for use of PULPS from their collections to illustrate "Noble, Yet Savage, Yet Pure". Thank you, also, Will Murray for your work as Production Assistant on this issue.

Speaking for this issue, we are only a little late in meeting our intended shedule (relative to past issues, of course). 25/Feb./1976 as opposed to the announced 1/Jan./1976. Our next issue, an original collection from Strange Tales is due 7/April/1976. It, at this finger crossed moment is right on shedule. Good reading to you. Until then, we remain:

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